AN ANALYSIS OF THE BASS LINE IN BACH'S FRENCH SUITES

by

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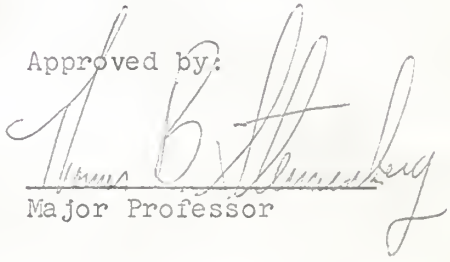

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INTRODUCTION

The analysis is based on Klavierwerke, Breitkopf edition, Busoni-Ausgave, by Johann Sebastian Bach. The French Suites were chosen as material for this analysis because the dances which make up the suites are relatively short and since they are dance movements there are frequent cadence punctuations, facilitating ease in handling an analysis of the bass line. These dance movements are invariably in binary form, either symmetrical, (i.e., with both sections of about the same length) or asymmetrical, i.e., with the second section expanded in a manner foreshadowing the sonata form.

Willi Apel in the Harvard Dictionary of Music defines binary and ternary form thus:

> The terms signify two basic musical forms, consisting of two or of three main sections respectively. The binary form follows the scheme A B, with each section repeated; the ternary form (also called: Song form) follows the scheme A B A. Examples of the former category abound in the allemandes, gavottes, etc., of Bach's suites.[1]

The binary form is essentially a stylistic and structural entity, a unified whole which, like many phrases in music, falls into two halves, the second of which forms the logical and necessary completion of the first. Stylistically the binary form uses the same or similar material throughout. Briefly stated, the binary form is a continuous form, the ternary, a sectional form. The historical development of the binary form

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[1]Willi Apel, Harvard Dictionary of Music, p. 86.

is of particular interest since it includes one of the most important developments of music history, namely, that leading to the sonata-form of the classical sonata, symphony etc.; the historical development of the sonata form clearly shows its derivation from binary schemes, such as were used in the dance movements of the suite.

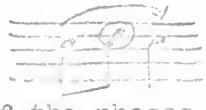
The purpose of this analysis was an attempt to discover the underlying structure of the bass line in the French Suites by Johann Sebastian Bach. It seeks to demonstrate how a few basic techniques miraculously unfold into the infinite variety, the broad and rich life, of the actual compositions. The work of the genius is distinguished from the work of lesser talent; only the creation of the genius has the divinity of structure which produces great music such as Bach.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The report is based on an analysis of Klavierwerke, Breitkopf edition, Busoni-Ausgave, by J. S. Bach. It was noted that a great deal of uniformity exists in the movement of the bass line in the six suites included in the work; hence, Suite II in minor and Suite VI in major were made the subjects for this analysis.

The first step in the analysis of the bass line was the locating of cadences as terminations of important segments of the bass line. Cadences refer to authentic, especially perfect authentic cadences and half cadences whose effects are tonally

punctuative. Perfect authentic cadences will be indicated by the abbreviation, p.a.c.; imperfect authentic cadences, i.a.c. In the case of the authentic cadences, leaps from roots I to V were used as determining factors. Each such bass span is referred to as a phase.

The second step was the determination of essential notes and the relationship of the unessential in movement from one essential to another. The essential notes refer to those used in a contrapuntal sense in relation to the upper voice. Some unessential notes are basically notes of movement, that is, of covering different pitch intervals between essential tones; for instance: other unessential notes, on the other hand, are ornamental, as 

Different sections of the phases, marked by whether they are series of essential bass tones, progressing by different pitches to their cadences, or remaining centered around some pitch axis, were then set aside as stages. The purpose, as has been implied, was to establish some stages as being static in character, that is, over a length of time making no actual progress toward the cadences, and to establish others as being truly progressive. A static stage occurs when a relatively short segment, one or two measures, for instance, begins and ends on the same essential note or its octave by leap. A progressing stage involves the lineal aspects of the bass line. This progress is essentially in scale lines, less frequently in

intervals of thirds, fourths, fifths in a sequence, or in leaps of the interval of a third, fourth, fifth or sixth without scale line connection, then progressing to the cadence.

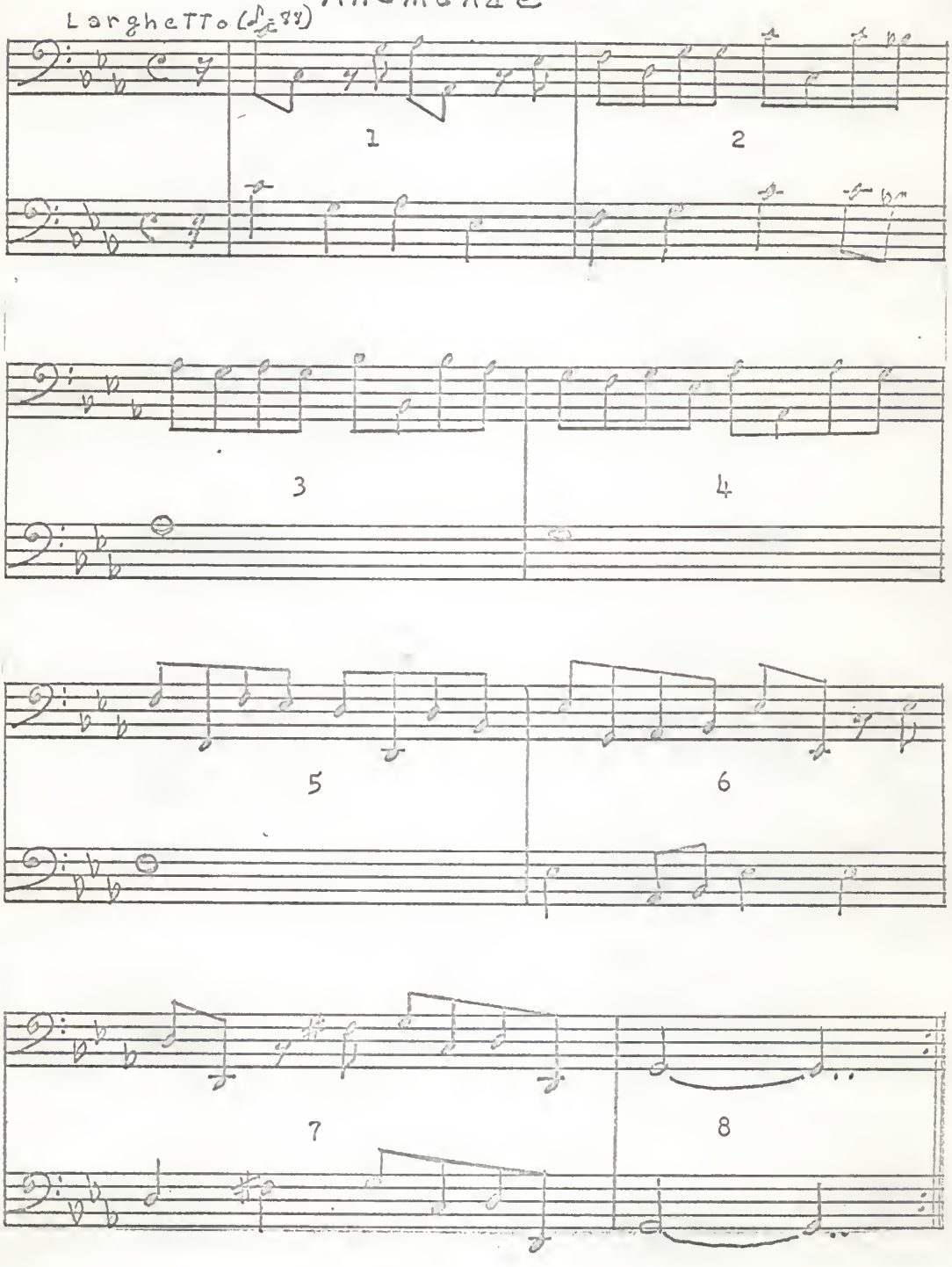
The term scalewise progression is used loosely and does not necessarily apply to one key. In conjunct motion there might be a modulation to another key. Some scale line movements imply chord changes, while others might include non-harmonic tones. No particular differentiation is made. Bach often uses the leap of the seventh rather than progressing to the second without altering the scale line.

SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE

Part I includes mm. 1-8, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in the key of G major. The first phase is a six measure phase, ending on the third beat of m. 6 with an i.a.c. in the key of E flat major. The first stage, from m. 1 to the third beat of m. 2, is in an interval pattern of a fourth down and a second up, which forms a sequence in thirds. The bass then moves from F to G with a leap up to C. In the second stage, from the fourth beat of m. 2 to the first beat of m. 6, the bass is a descending scale line from C to E flat, supporting harmonic and passing tones, these tones forming sequences. The third stage, the second and third beats of m. 6, is an i.a.c. in the key of E flat major.

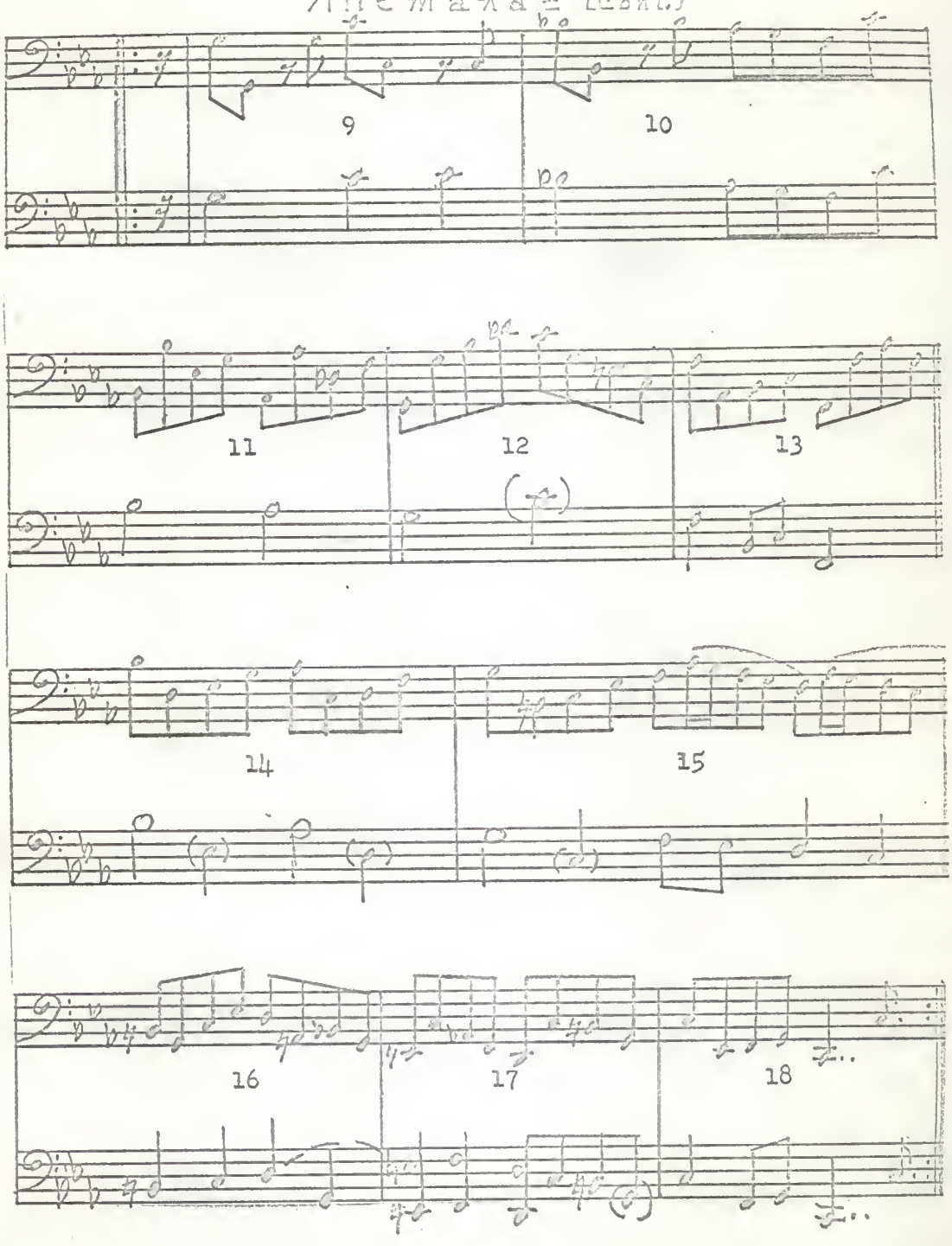
The second phase is a two measure phase ending in a p.a.c. in the key of G major. The first stage, from the fourth beat of m. 6 to the third beat of m. 7, features a bass which moves from E flat down to D, then skips to F sharp and progresses to G, thus establishing the key of G major. The second stage, from the last half of the third beat of m. 7 and m. 8, is a cadence in the key of G major.

Allemande

SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE (CONT.)

Part II includes mm. 9-18, beginning in c minor and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of C major. The first phase, mm. 9-13, ends with a p.a.c. in the key of f minor. In the first stage, m. 9, the bass leaps upward from G to C. In the second stage, from the fourth beat of m. 9 and m. 10, the bass proceeds from C up to B flat, then scalewise downward to F. In the third stage, from the anacrusis of m. 11 to the first beat of m. 13, the bass moves scalewise downward from C to G, with a reference back to C and down to F, thus establishing the key of f minor. This scale line supports harmonic and passing tones and these tones in turn form a sequence; the fourth stage, the last three beats of m. 13, is a cadence in the key of f minor.

The second phase, mm. 14-18, ends with a p.a.c. in C major. In the first stage, mm. 14-15, though basically outlining the descending c minor scale, the bass moves in fifths, (B flat-E flat, A flat-D, G-C.) these intervals forming sequences. The bass then skips up to F with a scalewise progression down to C. The second stage, m. 16, moves scalewise from B natural up to D, then skips down to G. In the third stage, m. 17 and the first beat of m. 18, the scale line virtually continues as the bass moves from E natural to F, then skips down to G and back to C. The fourth stage, the last three beats of m. 18, is a cadence in the key of C major.

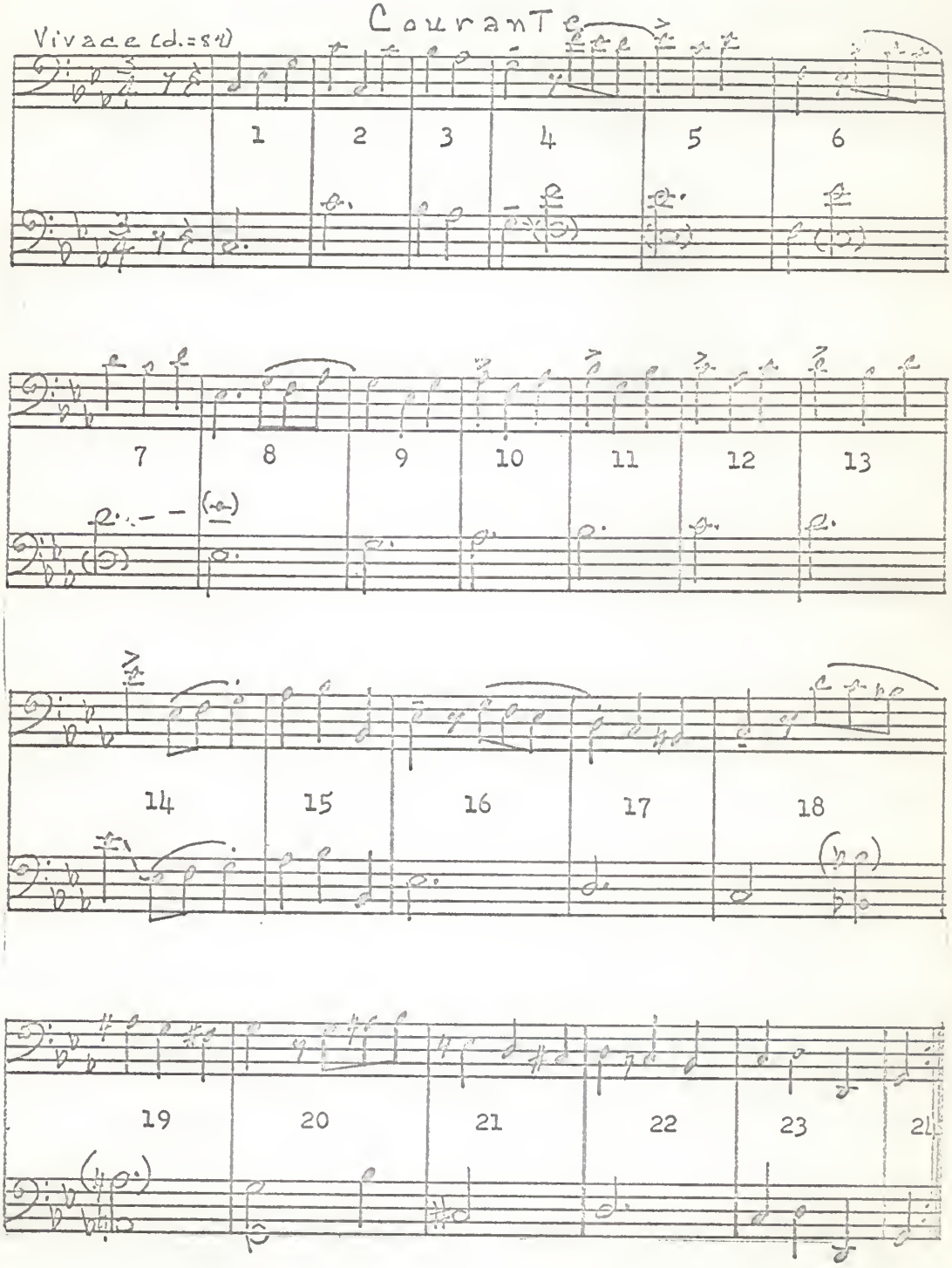
Allemande (cont.)

SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF COURANTE

Part I includes mm. 1-24, beginning in c minor and ending in G major. The first phase is a sixteen measure phase, m. 1 to the first beat of m. 16, ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major. In the first stage, m. 1 to the first beat of m. 4, the bass is harmonically static for two measures, with four references to C, then moves scalewise downward to G in m. 4, outlining the upper tetrachord in the key of c minor. The second stage, which actually continues the scale passage, from the last half of the second beat of m. 4 to m. 8, features a sequence, (F, E flat, F) and (E flat, D, E flat). This line supports harmonic and passing tones. The third stage, mm. 9-16, is an ascending scale line from G to B flat, altered only by the octave, this line supporting harmonic and passing tones. M. 15 and the first beat of m. 16 form a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major.

The second phase, mm. 17-24, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of G major. The first stage, mm. 16-22, beginning with the anacrusis of m. 16, is a descending scale line from E flat to G, with a skip up to B flat. Another scale line is formed to D, altered only by the octave. These scale lines support harmonic and passing tones. A second stage, mm. 23-24, comprises a p.a.c. in the key of G major.

Courante

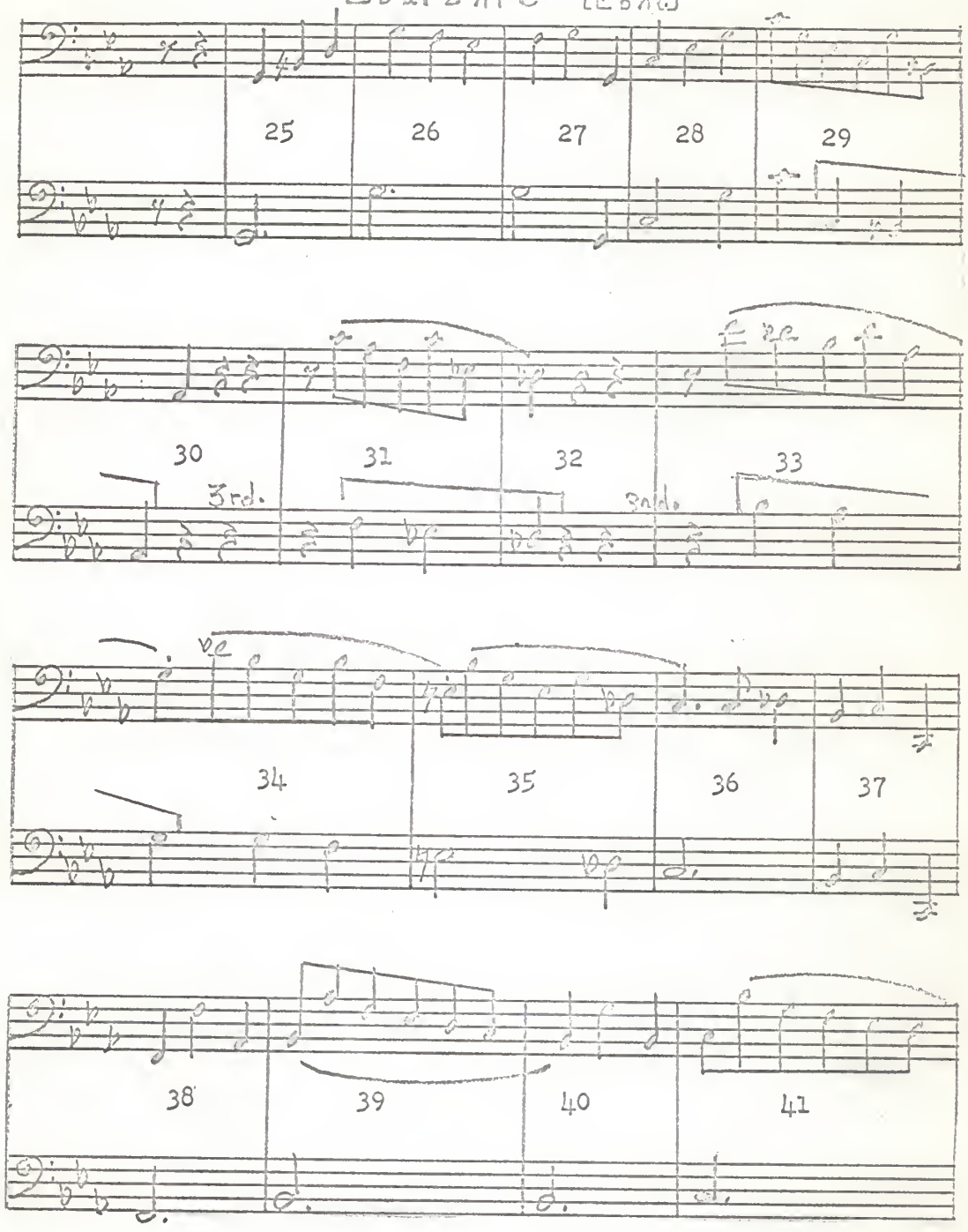


SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF COURANTE (CONT.)

Part II includes mm. 25-57, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. The first phase, mm. 25-38, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of f minor. In the first stage, m. 25 to the first beat of m. 28, the bass is harmonically static for three measures, leaping to C in m. 28. There are four references to G. This bass line supports harmonic and passing tones. In the second stage, from the third beat of m. 28 to m. 38, the bass leaps up to G then moves in sequences of thirds, (C, B flat, A flat), (F, E flat, D flat), (B flat, A flat, G), (G, F, E natural), then moves from D flat to C. Mm. 37-38 form a p.a.c. in the key of f minor.

The second phase, from the third beat of m. 39 to m. 57, begins in the key of E flat major and ends in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. The first stage, m. 39 to the third beat of m. 46 is an ascending scalewise progression from B flat to A flat.


Courante (Cont.)
25
26
27
28
29
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3rd.
31
32
3rd.
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36
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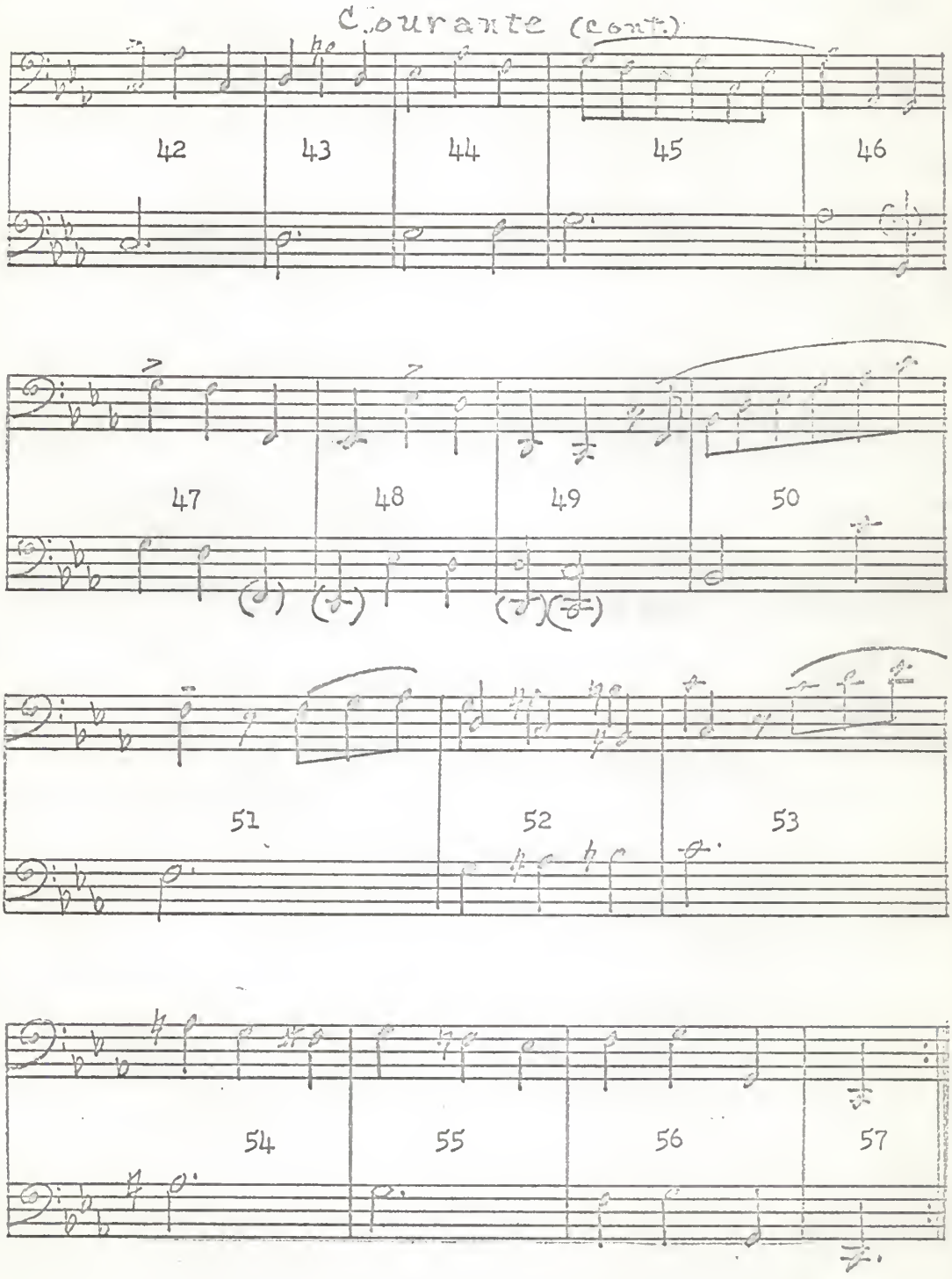
39
40
41

EXPLANATION OF COURANTE (CONT.)

The second stage, from the second beat of m. 46 to the third beat of m. 50, is a descending scale line from G to B flat, altered only by the octave of the B flat. The third stage, from the third beat of m. 50 to m. 56, features a bass line which leaps down a fifth from C to F, then progresses scalewise up to C, outlining the upper tetrachord in the key of c minor (melodic), then moves to A natural and on to G. The fourth stage, mm. 56-57, is a p.a.c. in the key of c minor.


Courante (cont.)
42
43
44
45
46
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48
49
50
51
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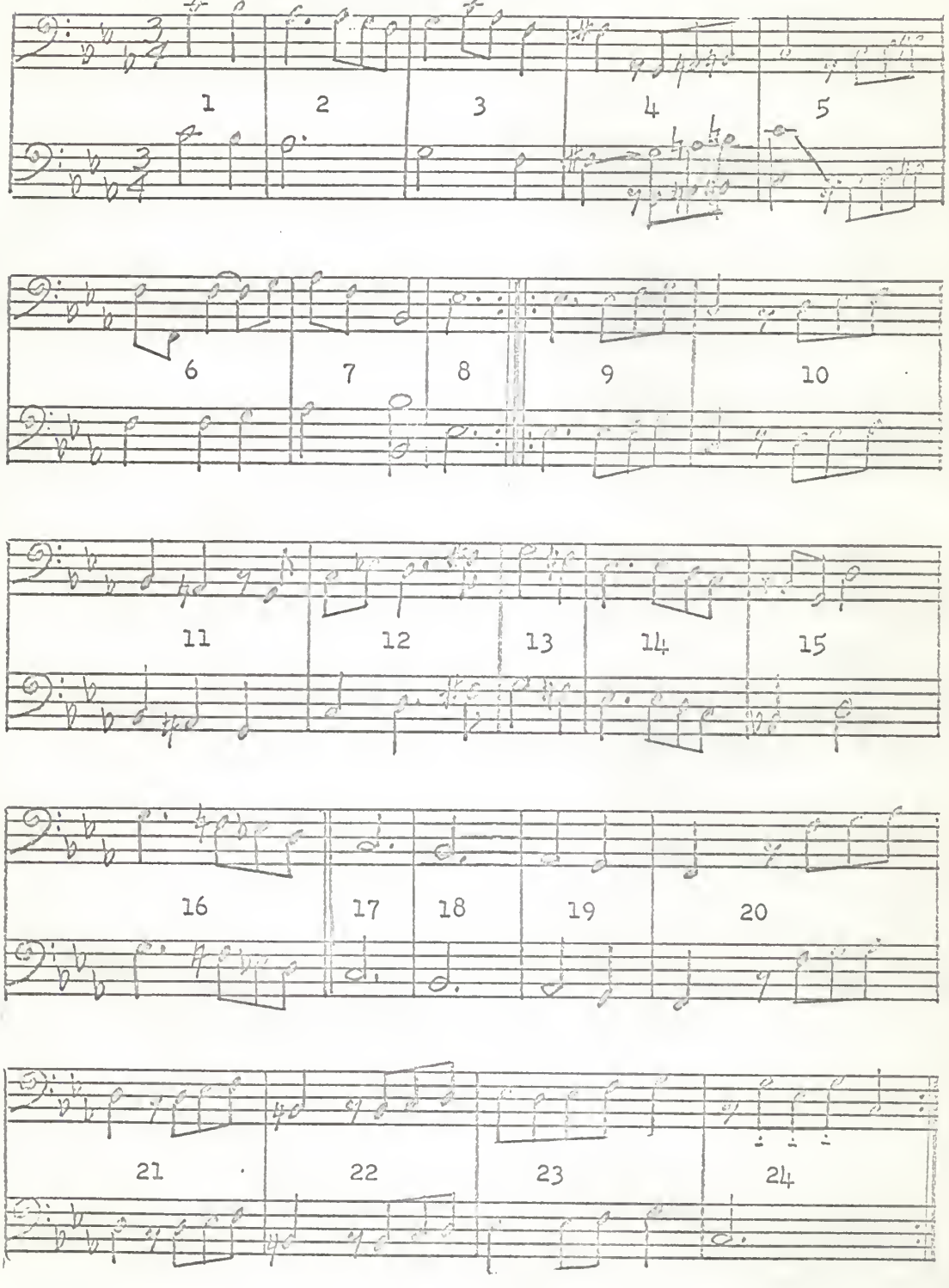
54
55
56
57

SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF SARABANDE

Part I includes mm. 1-8, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in E flat major. The first phase is a four measure phase, ending in an i.a.c. in the first beat of m. 5. In the first stage, mm. 1-3, the movement in the bass covers a descent from middle C to F. The second stage, m. 4 and the first beat of m. 5, is an i.a.c. in c minor, with a scalewise progression outlining the upper tetrachord in the melodic minor. The second phase, first stage, from the last half of the second beat of m. 5 to the second beat of m. 7, is an ascending scale progression from C to B flat. A second stage, from the third beat of m. 7 and m. 8, progresses from B flat to E flat, thus establishing the key of E flat major. The entire eight measures is reducable to a descending and an ascending scale passage, unbroken except by octave transitions, to the penultimate cadence chord.

Andante con espressione Sarabande

EXPLANATION OF SARABANDE (CONT.)

Part II includes mm. 9-24, beginning in E flat major and ending in c minor. The first phase, mm. 9-16, is an eight measure phase, ending in a p.a.c. in the key of G major. In the first stage, mm. 9-12, the bass moves scalewise up from E flat to G then skips to C, a fifth below, followed by another ascent scalewise to F, with a skip to B flat, a fifth below. Now the progresses to A natural and G, then skips up a fourth to C, then moves on to D. A second stage, from the last half of the third beat of m. 12 to m. 16, is a progression from F sharp up to G with a descent scalewise to B flat, with a skip up to D, then to G, thus forming a p.a.c. in the key of G major.

EXPLANATION OF SARABANDE (CONT.)

The second phase, from the last half of the second beat of m. 16 to the second beat of m. 20, is a four measure phase ending in a p.a.c. in the key of f minor. The entire phase is one stage, descending scalewise from F natural to F, altered by the octave on the second beat of m. 20.

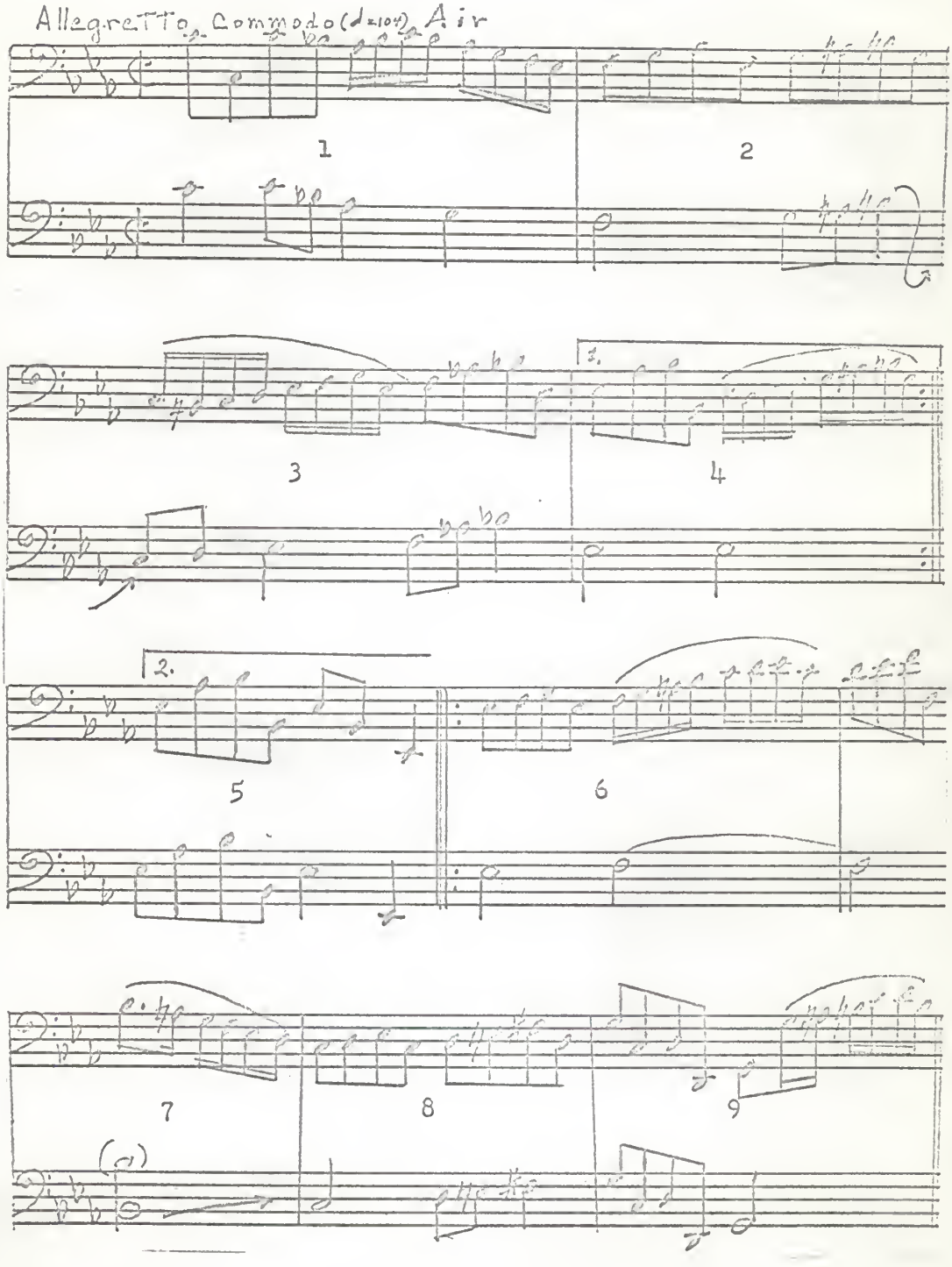
The third phase, from the third beat of m. 20 to m. 24, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. In the first stage, from the third beat of m. 20 to the second beat of m. 23, the bass moves from G to A flat with a skip down to D, moving scalewise up to F with another skip down to B natural, then progressing scalewise to E flat. The second stage, from the last half of the second beat of m. 23 and m. 24 is a cadence in the key of c minor.

SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF AIR

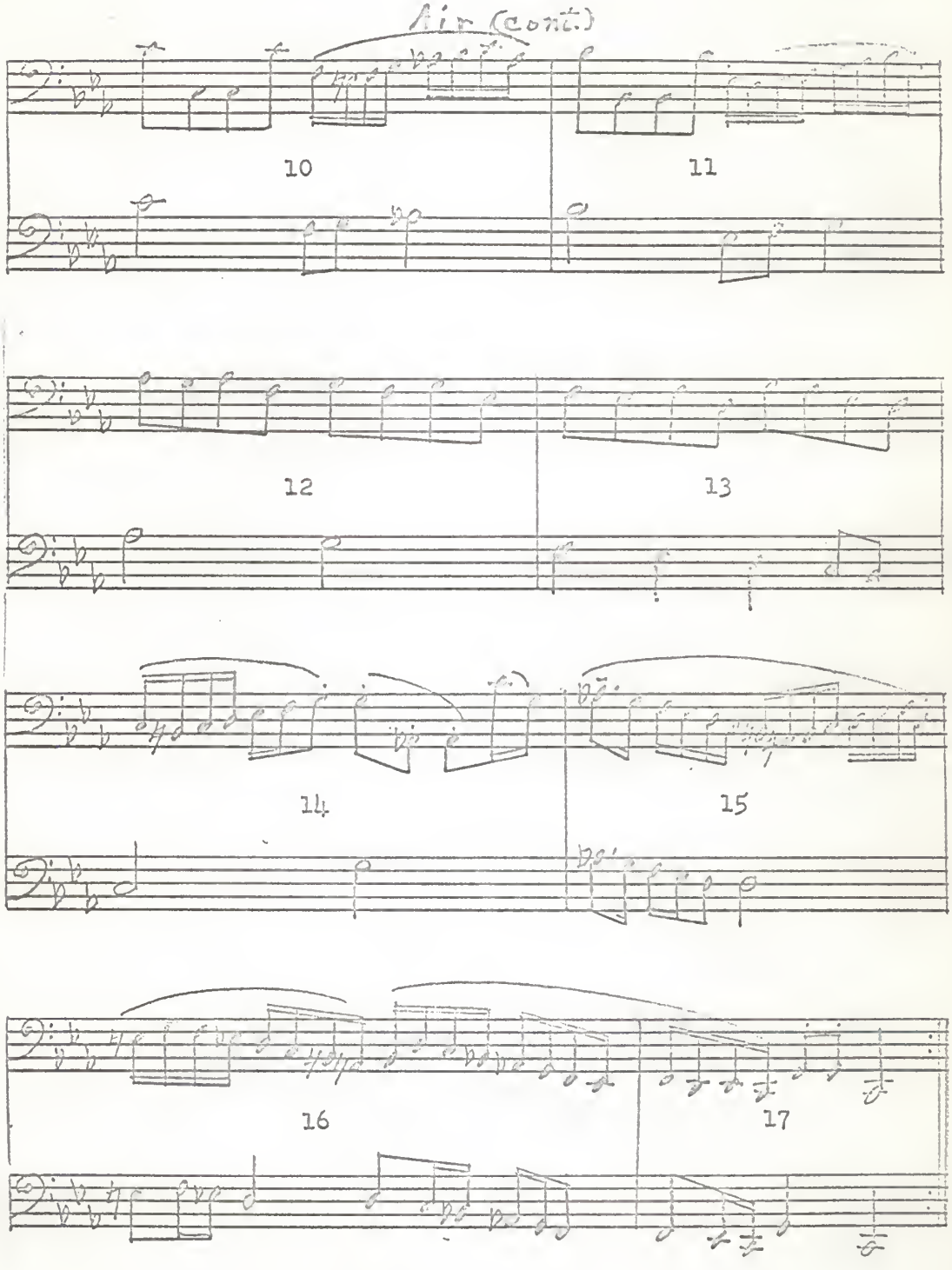
Part I includes mm. 1-5, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major. The first phase is a five measure phase including all of Part I. In the first stage, m. 1 to the third beat of m. 3, the bass forms a descending scale line from C to F, then ascends again to F. This scale line supports harmonic and passing tones which in turn support small scale fragments and fake sequences. The second stage is a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major.

Part II includes mm. 6-17, beginning in the key of E flat major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. The first phase, mm. 6-9, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of g minor. In the first stage, mm. 6-7, the bass moves from E flat up to F, then skips up to B flat. This bass supports harmonic and passing tones and scale fragments. In the second stage, m. 8 and the first beat of m. 9, the bass moves on the upper tetrachord of the g minor scale. This yields a scale line which actually opens in m. 7 on a transposed B flat. The third stage is a p.a.c. in the key of G major.


Allegretto Commodo (♩=104) Air
1
2
3
1.
4
2.
5
6
7
8
9

EXPLANATION OF AIR (CONT.)

The second phase, mm. 10-17, begins in the key of f minor and ends in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. In the first stage, mm. 10-11, the bass moves in fifths from C-F, and B flat to E flat. The first two beats of mm. 10 and 11 are harmonically static, making four references to each of the tones C and B flat. The third and fourth beats of mm. 10-11 are scalewise progressions which form sequences. In the second stage, m. 12 to the second beat of m. 14, the bass descends scalewise from A flat to C, supporting harmonic and passing tones and these tones in turn forming sequences. If the second phase is considered in its entirety, an overall scale, C and B flat (first beats of mm. 10 and 11) A flat, G, (first and third beats, m. 12) F, E flat, D, C, B flat, (m. 13), is found.

In the third stage, from the third beat of m. 14 to m. 17, the bass skips to G, then progresses to A flat, moving scalewise downward to D then back up to F and again moving scalewise down from F to E flat, a ninth below. This bass line supports harmonic and passing tones and scale fragments. M. 17 is a p.a.c. in the key of c minor.

Air (cont.)
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

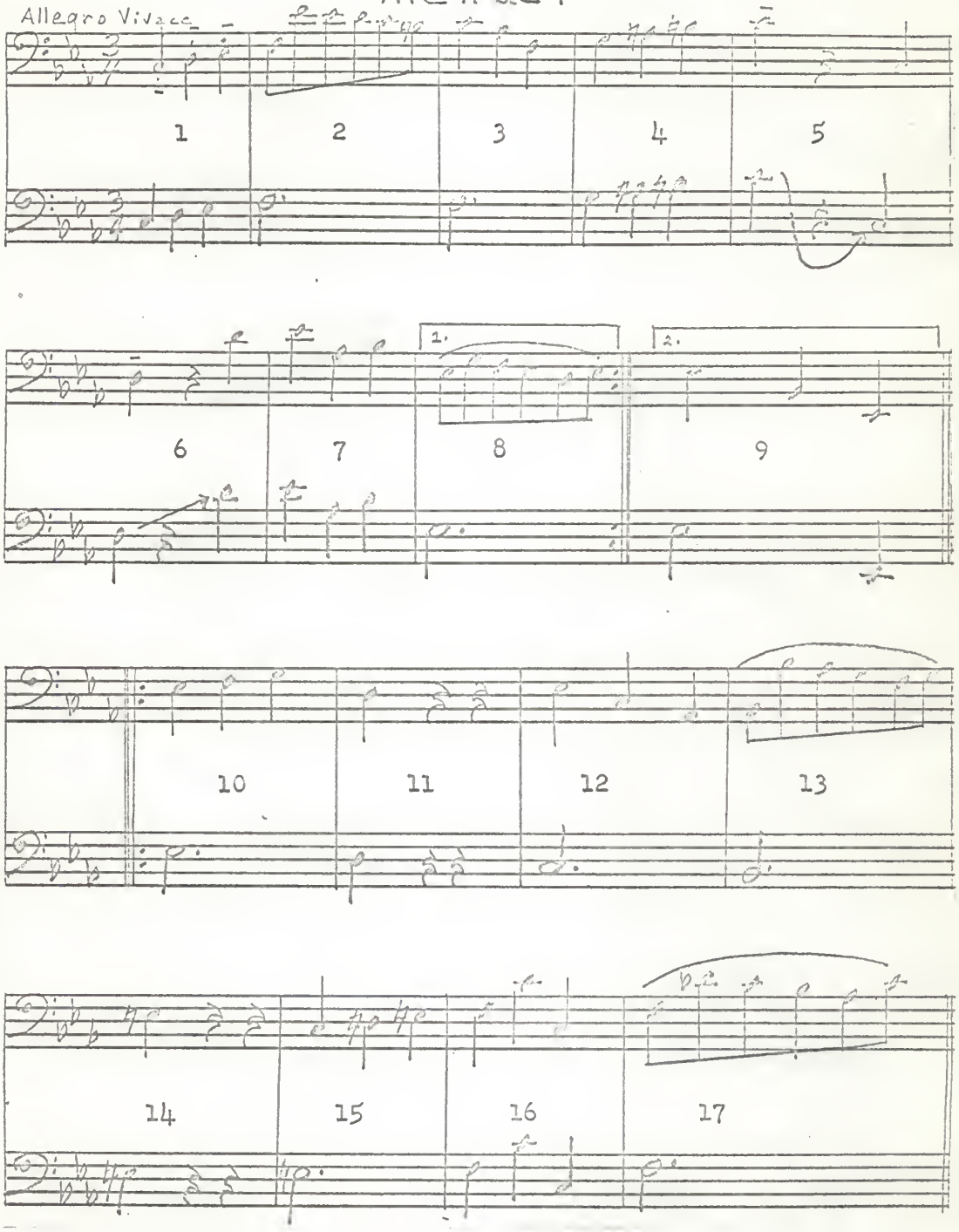
SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF MENUET I

Part I includes mm. 1-9, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major. The first phase includes the nine measures of part I. In the first stage, m. 1 to the first beat of m. 7, the bass outlines the c minor scale from C to E flat, a tenth above. This bass is supported by harmonic and passing tones which in turn outline a scale fragment. The second stage, from the second beat of m. 7 to m. 9, is a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major.

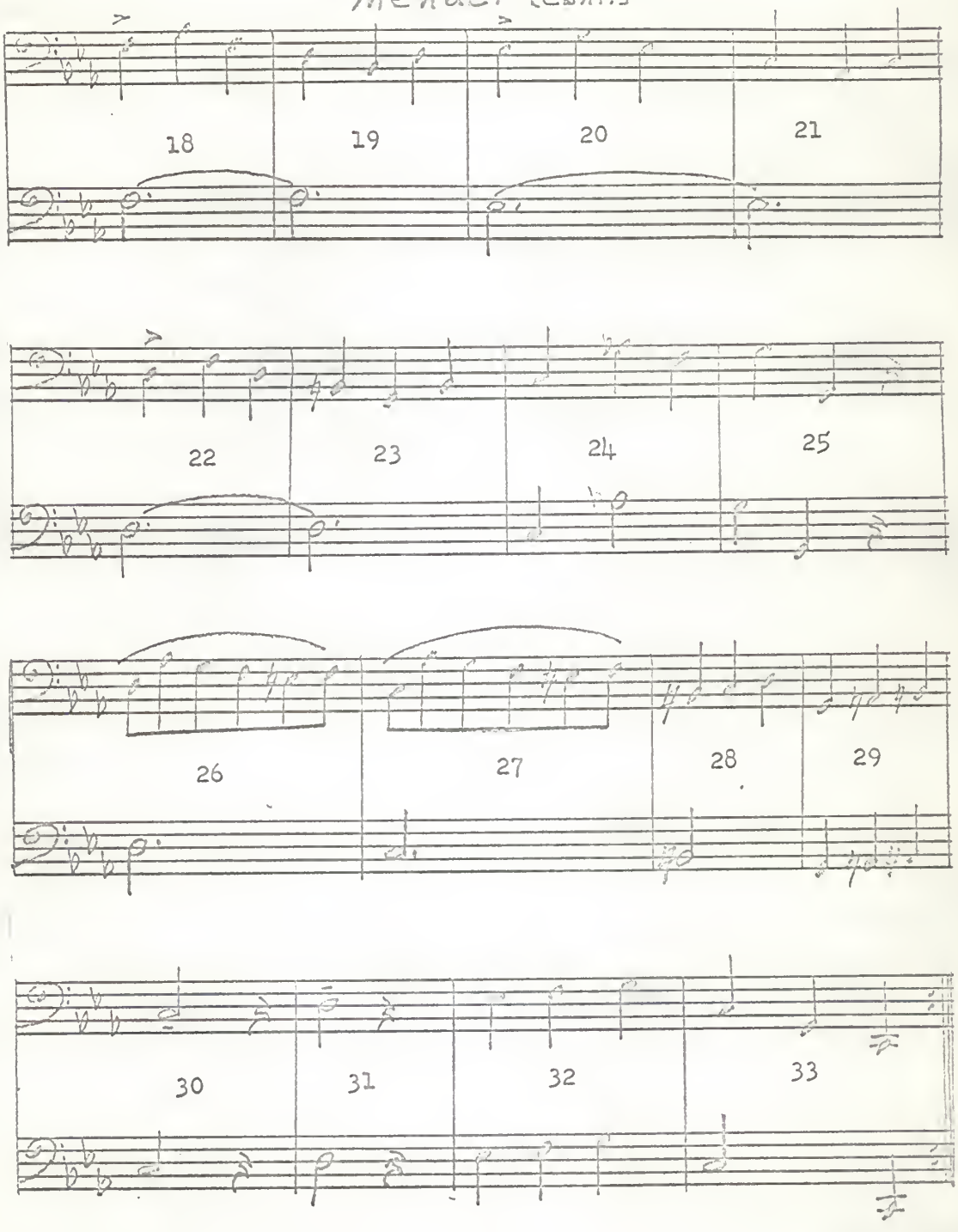
Part II includes mm. 10-33, beginning in the key of E flat major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. The first phase, an eight measure phase, including mm. 10-17, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of f minor. In the first stage, mm. 10-13, the bass outlines a descending scale line from E flat to B flat. This bass supports harmonic and passing tones and short scale fragment. In the second stage, mm. 14-17, the bass progresses from E natural to F, then skips to c with a cadence in the key of f minor.

Menuet



EXPLANATION OF MENUET (CONT.)

The second phase, mm. 18-33, begins in the key of f minor and ends in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. The first stage, mm. 18-25, outlines a descending scale line from F-C, with a skip upwards to A flat, then back to G, forming a half cadence in the key of c minor. This bass line supports harmonic tones, these tones forming sequences. In the second stage, mm. 26-28, the bass progresses from D scalewise downward to B natural, and supports harmonic and passing tones. In the third stage, mm. 29-33, the bass moves scalewise ascending from G to G uninterrupted, skipping down to C. The second beat of m. 32 and m. 33 form the p.a.c. in the key of c minor.

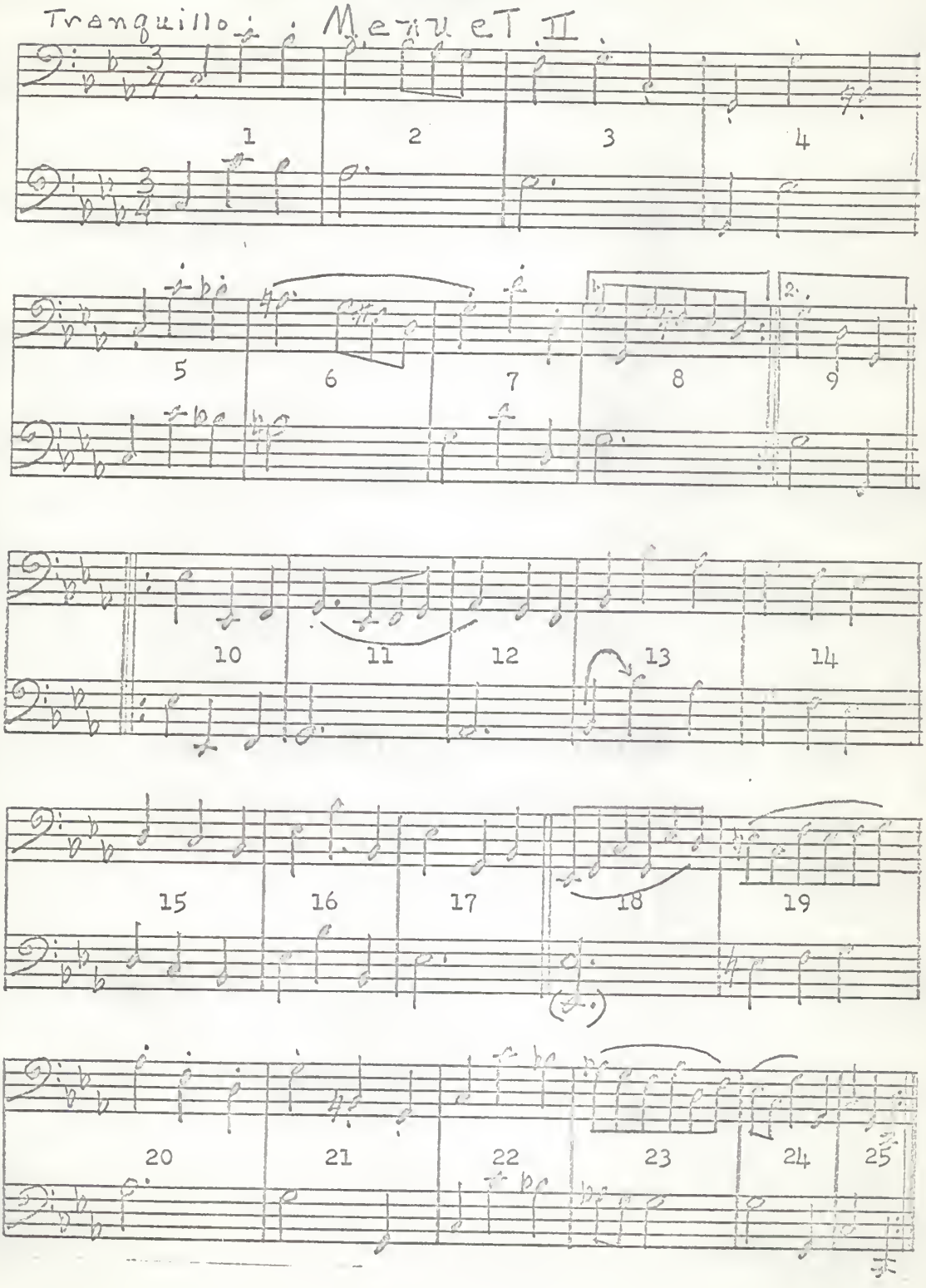
Menuet (cont.)

SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF MENUET II

Part I includes mm. 1-9, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of G major. The first phase includes all of part I. In the first stage, mm. 1-4, the bass outlines a descending scale line from C-G. In the second stage, from m. 5 to the first beat of m. 7, the bass outlines a scalewise progression from C descending to G, the lower tetrachord in the key of g minor. The third stage, from the second beat of m. 7 and m. 8, is a p.a.c. in the key of g minor.

Part II includes mm. 10-25, beginning in the key of E flat major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. The first phase is an eight measure phase, from m. 10 to m. 17, ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major. The first stage, m. 10 to the second beat of m. 13, is an ascending scalewise progression from E flat to B flat. The second stage, from the second beat of m. 13 to m. 17, is a descending scale line of E flat major from B flat to B flat, which then skips to E flat, thus establishing a cadence in the key of E flat major.

The second phase, mm. 18-25, is an eight measure phase, beginning in the key of E flat major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of c minor. In the first stage, mm. 18-21, the bass outlines an ascending scale from E flat to A flat, then moves back to G. The second stage, mm. 22-25, is a descending upper tetrachord in c minor. The leap from G to C forms a p.a.c. in the key of c minor.


Tranquillo
Menuet II
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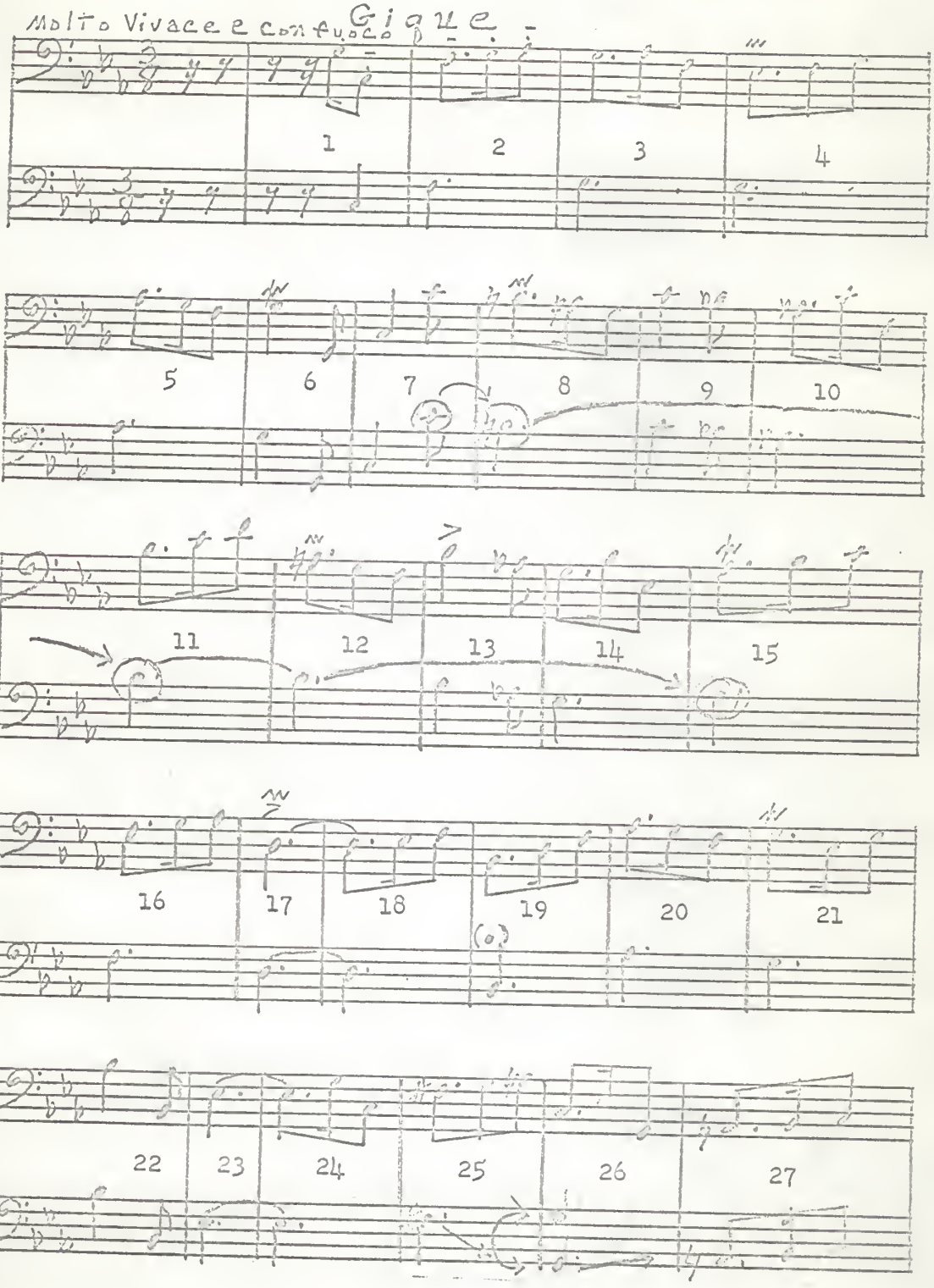
SUITE II

EXPLANATION OF GIQUE

Part I includes mm. 1-32, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in the key of G major. The first phase is a twenty-three measure phase ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major. The passage breaks into three stages, the first includes the first measure to the first beat of m. 7. In this stage the bass skips from C to F, a fourth above, then progresses scalewise up to A flat and back to G, with a leap downward of the octave and up again to C. In the second stage, from the third beat of m. 7 to m. 21, the bass moves from middle C chromatically to B natural in m. 8, B flat in m. 11, and then by a step to A flat in m. 15. Each is the beginning of a sequence which in itself forms a subsidiary scale pattern. From A flat in m. 15 skips down in thirds to F, D and B flat occur; all are chord tones. In mm. 19-21, a scale passage, B flat to G develops. The third stage, mm. 22-23, is a p.a.c. in the key of E flat major.

The second phase, mm. 24-32, divides itself into two stages. The first stage, mm. 24-29, ascends scalewise from E flat to D, altered by the octave, then descends from D to G.

Molto Vivace e con fuoco
Gigue
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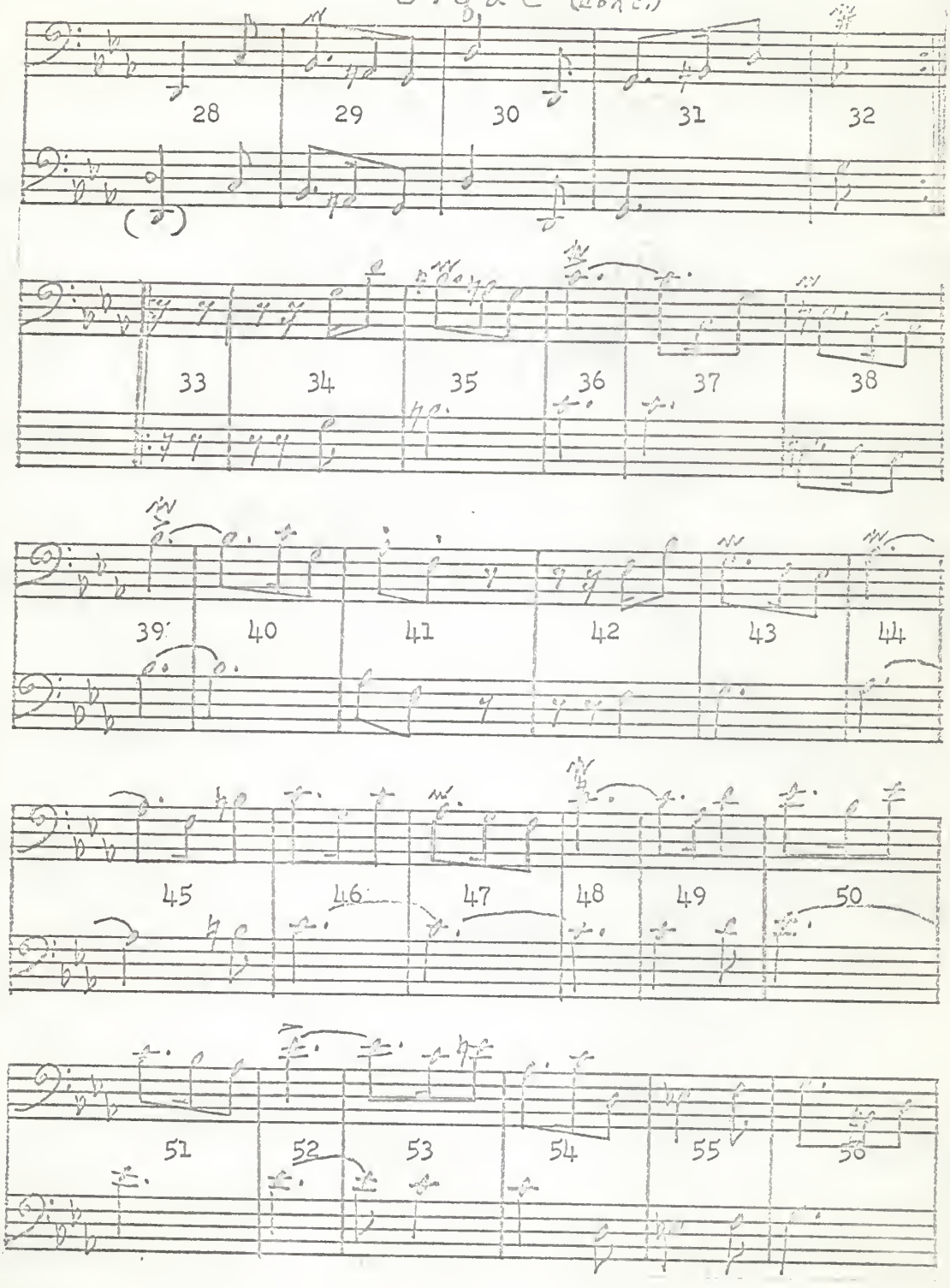
Mm. 30-32 form a cadence in the key of G major.

Part II includes mm. 33-84, beginning in the key of c minor and ending in the key of c minor. The first phase is a twenty-four measure phase ending in an i.a.c. in m. 56. In the first stage, mm. 33-40, the bass moves from G up to B natural, progressing to C then skipping down a sixth to E natural. The bass line then descends scalewise to A flat with a skip to F, a third below. The second stage, mm. 41-56, is an ascending scale progression from F to E flat, with a leap of a third downward to C and another ascending scale progression to G, this line altered by the octave, which forms the i.a.c.

Gigue (cont.)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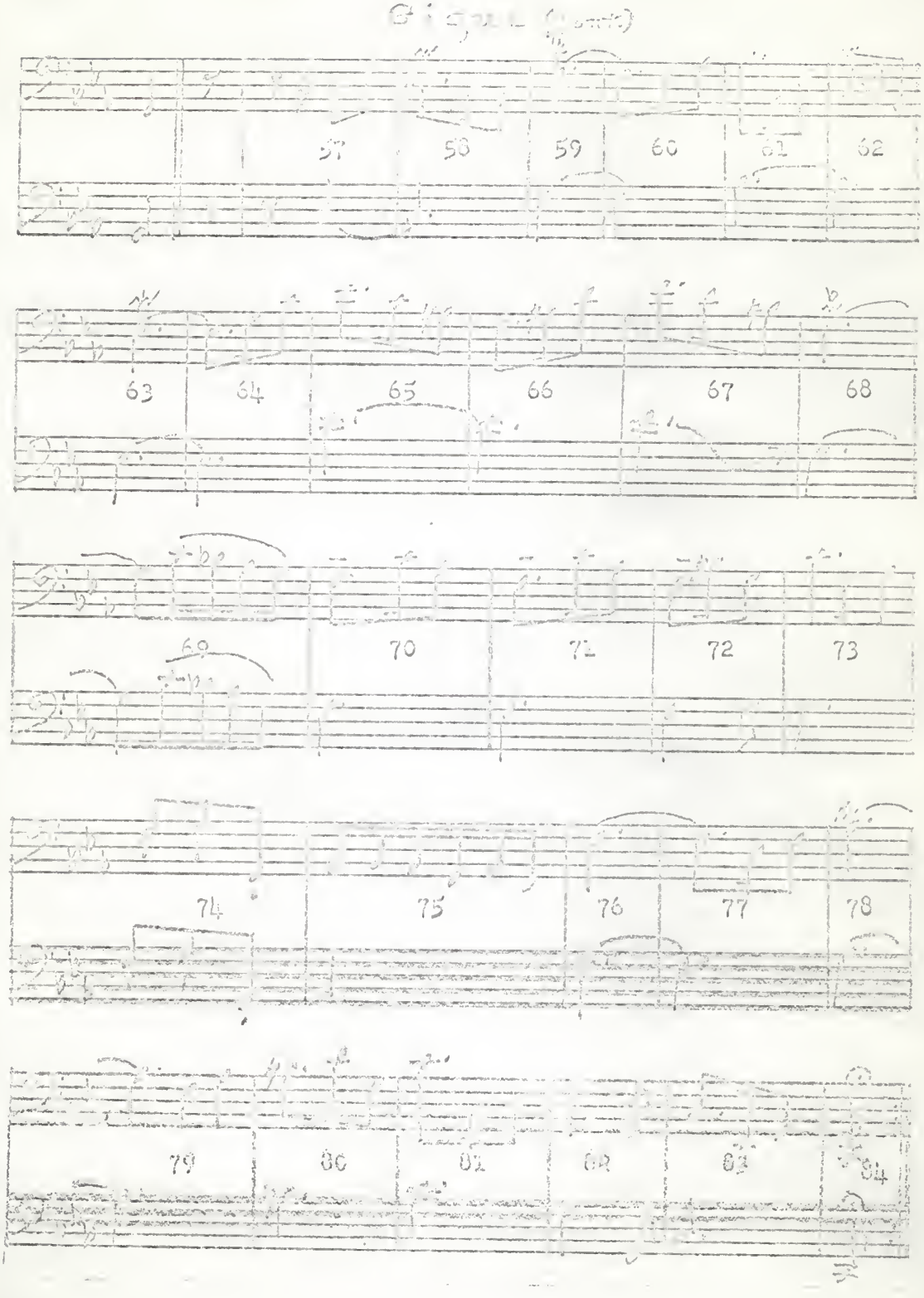
EXPLANATION OF GIQUE (CONT.)

The second phase is an eighteen measure phase ending in a deceptive cadence in m. 74. The first stage, mm. 57-64, is one of maneuver, where the bass moves in a pattern of fourths, whereby mm. 57, 58, 59 and 60 are a sequence of mm. 61, 62, 63 and 64. In the second stage, mm. 64-74, the bass ascends scalewise from E flat to G, altered by the octave, then leaps up a fourth to C, then proceeds downward scalewise to F where it remains for eight beats, moving up to G again with mm. 73-74, forming the deceptive cadence.

The third phase includes mm. 75-84. The first stage, mm. 75-81, features a leap from A flat to F, a sixth above, followed by a leap of a third up to A flat and a short scale progression, B natural and C. A second stage, mm. 82-84, is a cadence in the key of c minor.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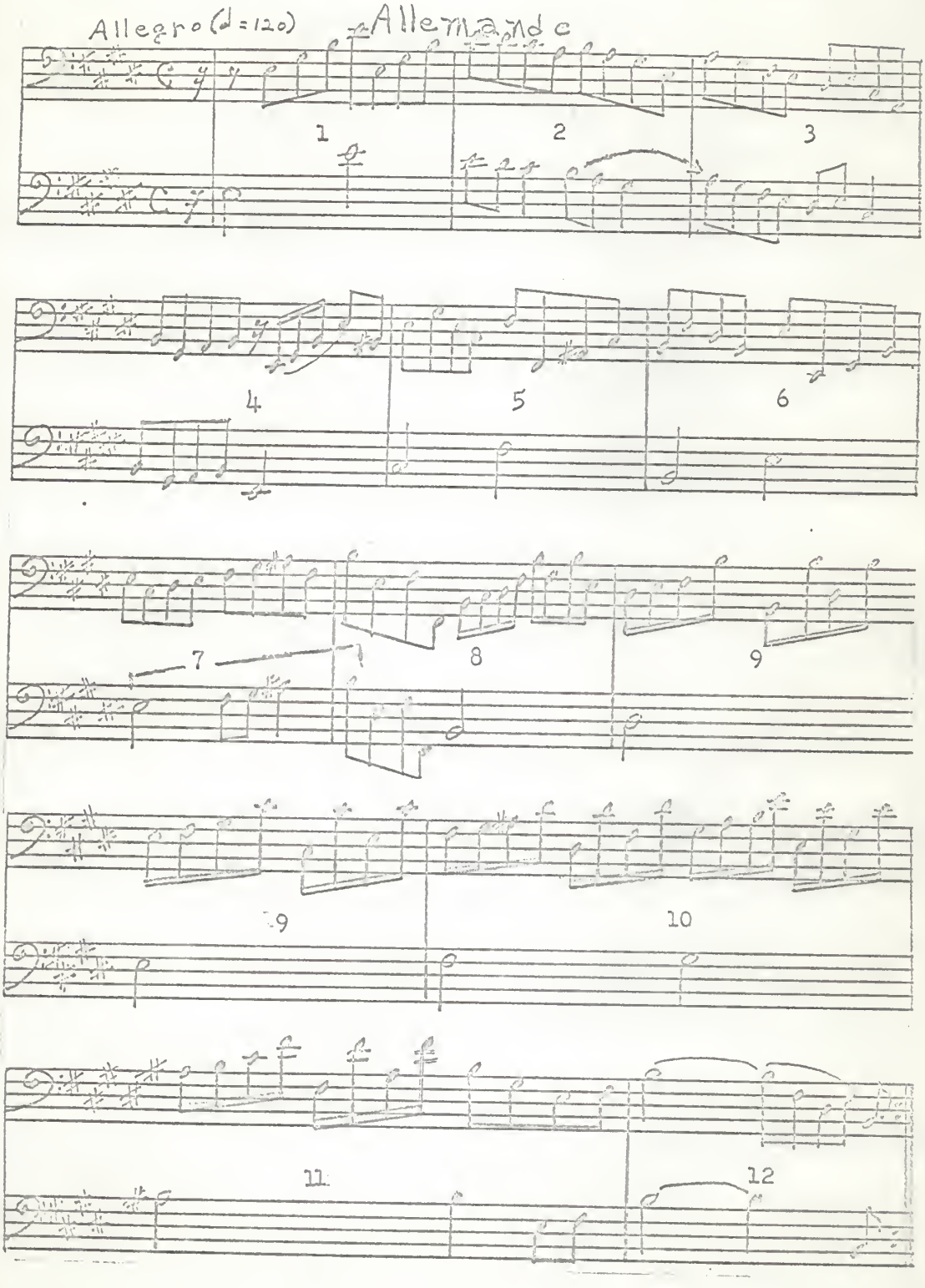
SUITE VI

EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE

Part I includes mm. 1-12, beginning in E major and ending in B major. The first phase is a four measure phase, mm. 1-4, ending on a p.a.c. in the third beat. The movement in the bass covers a descent from E' to great B, an eleventh below. In achieving this descent, the passage breaks into three stages. The first, in m. 1 and the first beat of m. 2, being harmonically static, makes four references to E, and the second, including mm. 2 and 3, makes a basic scale line descending to B, and the third, in the first three beats of m. 4, establishes the cadence. The scale line itself is formed of harmonic and passing tones, with the former occurring on the beats. The importance of this basic scale line lies in its projection of the E major scale. The line also supports subsidiary figures which include short scale fragments and a few leaps. These, reflecting the harmonic activity in such areas as they encompass, give rhythmic definition, develop sequences, etc., for the basic line itself is rhythmically featureless.


Allegro (♩=120)
Allemande
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12

EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE (CONT.)

The second phase, mm. 4-8, ends in a p.a.c. in B major in the third beat. Though the first stage, mm. 5-6, is one of maneuver, where the bass moves in a pattern of fourths and fifths, (C sharp, F sharp, B, E), by which m. 6 is a sequence of m. 5, no actual harmonic progress has been made, for the passage is controlled by the E in the preceding cadence in m. 4 and the E on which it terminates in m. 6.

The second stage, m. 7 and the first beat of m. 8, forms a basic ascending scale line from E to B which outlines the upper tetrachord of the B major scale, thereby establishing the key of the dominant. In the first two beats it supports a subsidiary figure reflecting the harmonic activity within that area.

The third stage, which includes the first three beats of m. 8, is marked by leaps implying the p.a.c. in B major.

EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE (CONT.)

The third phase, mm. 8-12, begins on the third beat of m. 8 and ends on a p.a.c. in B major. The bass assumes scalewise direction in m. 9 in the first stage, mm. 9-11 when it ascends the B major scale from D sharp to B with scale tones occurring on the first and third beats of each measure. It supports four sequences of a design of two beats duration which reflect the harmonic movement. The second stage, the last two beats of m. 11 and m. 12, is a p.a.c. in that key.

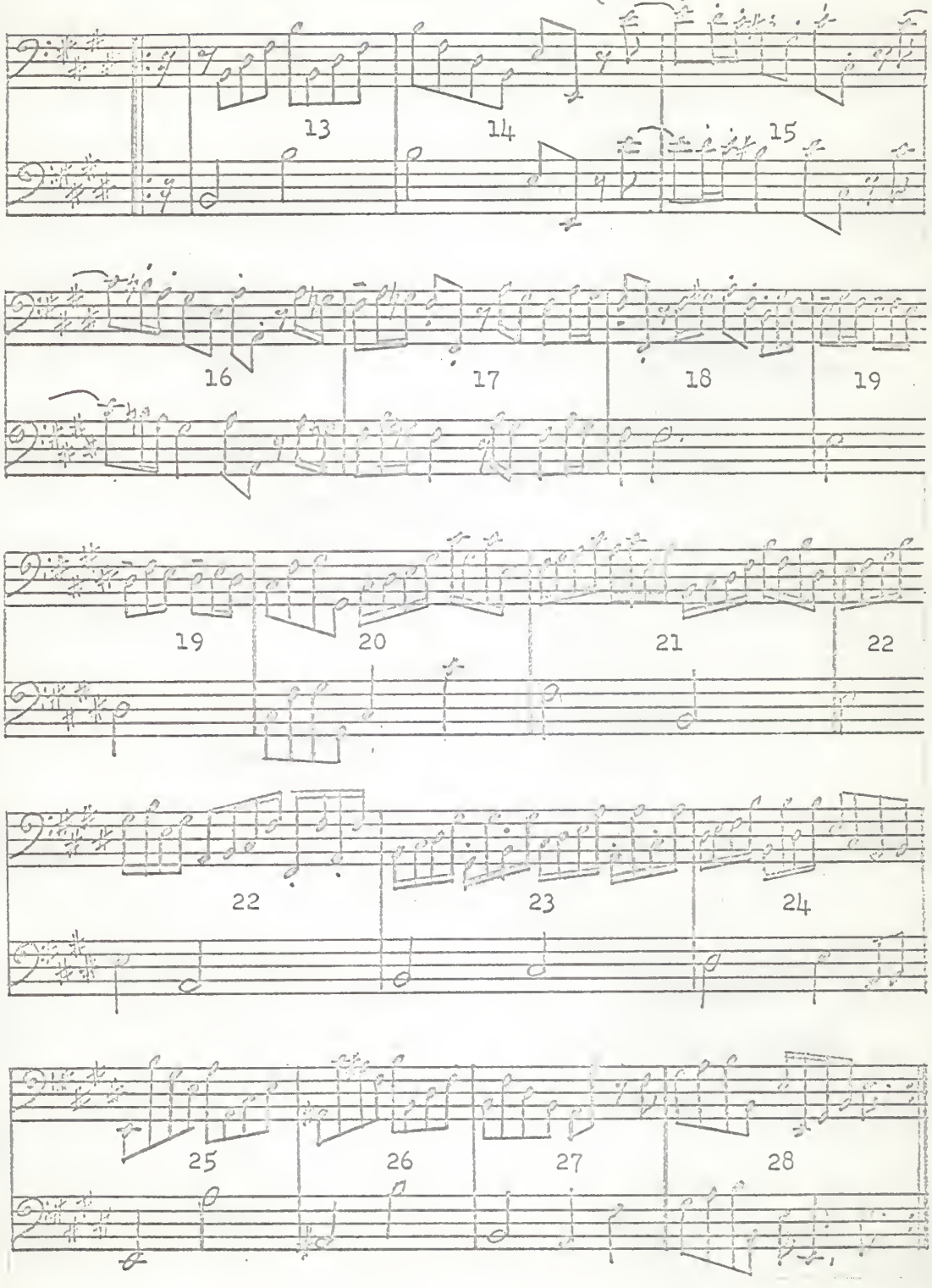
EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE (CONT.)

Part II includes mm. 13-28, beginning in B major and ending in E major. The first phase is an eight measure phase, mm. 13-20, ending in a p.a.c. The first stage, m. 13 and the first two beats of m. 14, being harmonically static, makes five references to B. The second stage, including the third and fourth beats of m. 14, m. 15 and the first three beats of m. 16, is a descending scale line from E to B sharp. The third and fourth beats of m. 15 and m. 16 feature a descending scale line from C sharp to G sharp, which moves back to A. The third stage, from the anacrusis of m. 17, and the first beat of m. 18 is a movement of thirds.

The fourth stage, from the second beat of m. 18 and m. 19, is a descending scale line ending on c on the first beat of m. 20, which with the second and third beats forms a p.a.c. in c sharp minor. The second phase, from the fourth beat of m. 20 to m. 25, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of E major. Through the first stage, from the fourth beat of m. 20 to the second beat of m. 22, there are leaps implying the p.a.c. in E major. In the second stage, from the third beat of m. 22 to m. 25, the bass assumes scalewise direction, ascending from A to E. The fourth stage, the fourth beat of m. 24 and the first beat of m. 25, is a p.a.c. in E major.

The third phase including mm. 25-28 ends in a p.a.c. in E major. In the first stage, from the third beat of m. 25 to m. 27, the bass ascends from A to A sharp, B and then back to A.

Allemande (cont.)

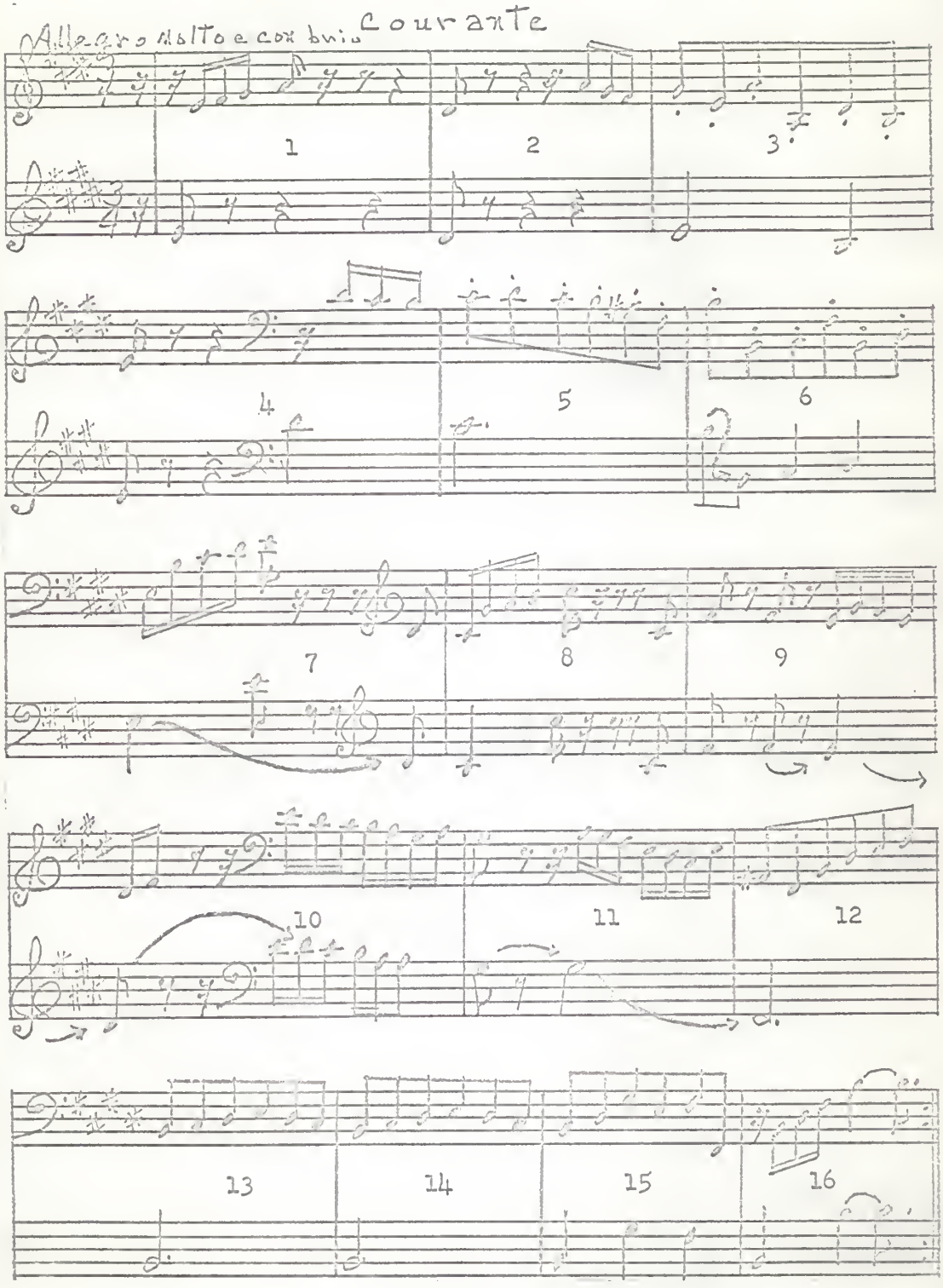


EXPLANATION OF ALLEMANDE (CONT.)

A second stage, from the anacrusis of m. 28 and m. 28, features an ascending scale line from F sharp to B, followed by a p.a.c. in the key of E major.

SUITE VI

EXPLANATION OF COURANTE

Part I includes mm. 1-16, beginning in the key of E major and ending in B major. The sixteen measures of Part I comprise the first phase. This phase divides itself into three stages. The first stage, m. 1 to the first beat of m. 4, moves from E to D sharp, then back to E, skipping down a fourth to B, then back to E on the first beat of m. 4. The second stage, from the third beat of m. 4 to m. 13, features a bass which descends scalewise from D sharp to B, then ascends to E, descending again to C sharp, leaping up a fourth to F sharp with another descent to F sharp in m. 12. In the third stage, mm. 13-16, the bass is static for two measures and one beat, mm. 13-14 being identical. Mm. 15-16 form a p.a.c. in the key of B major.

Allegro molto e con brio
Courante
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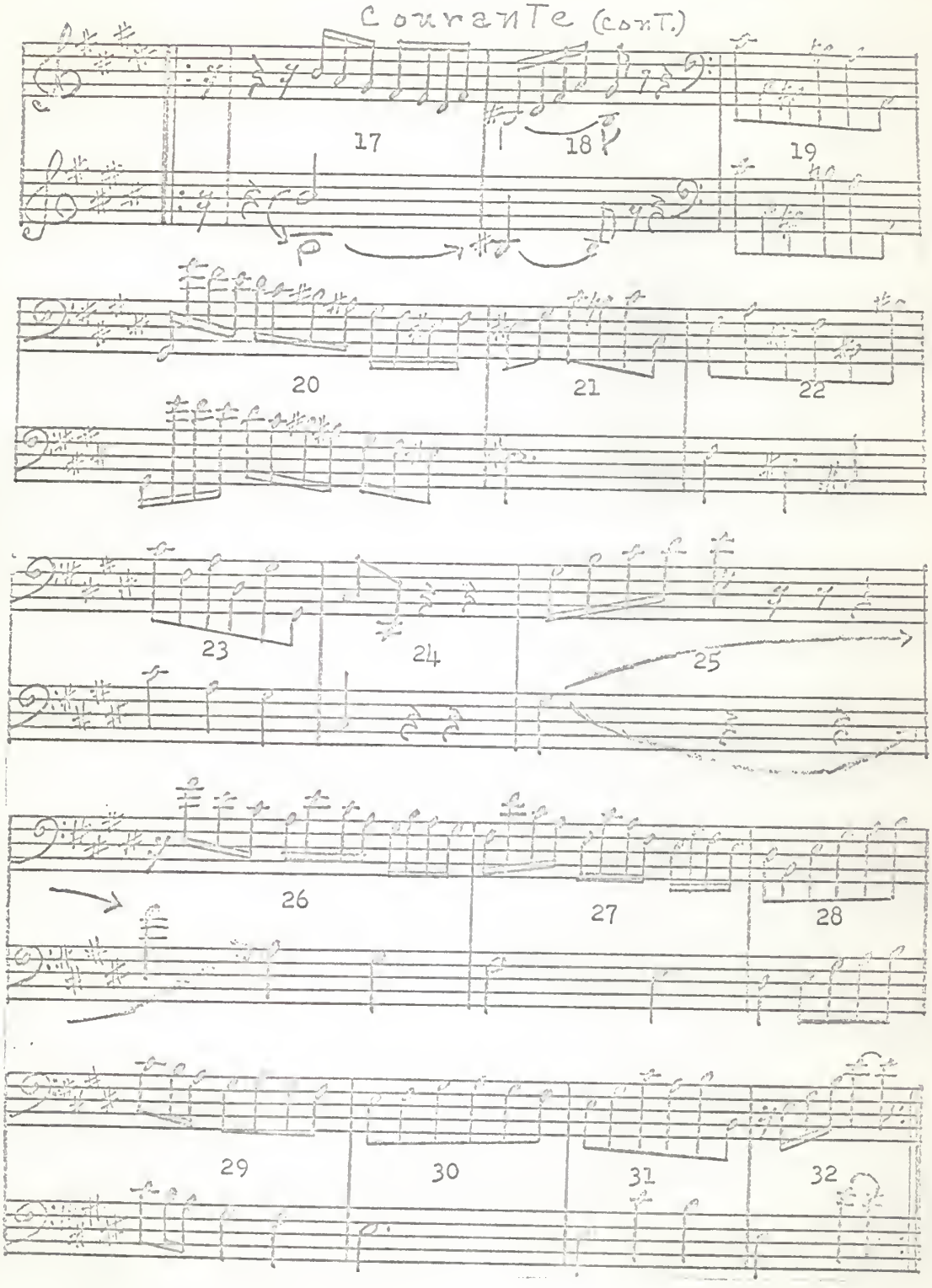
16

EXPLANATION OF COURANTE (CONT.)

Part II includes mm. 17-32, beginning in the key of B major and ending in E major. The sixteen measures of Part II comprise a phase. This phase divides itself into three stages. The first stage, mm. 17-20, features a bass line which skips from B natural down to B sharp, then up a half step to C sharp. This skip of a dim. 8th is the same as a half step ascent in the bass line. Now it descends scalewise to G sharp, with m. 20 forming a descending scale line from G sharp to E sharp, a tenth below. In the second stage, mm. 21-24, the bass moves from E sharp to F sharp with a leap down the interval of a third to D sharp. It leaps down another third to B sharp, followed by a skip from C sharp to A and down to G sharp, again skipping to C sharp, a fifth below. In the third stage, mm. 25-32, the bass moves scalewise from G sharp to A, altered by the octave, then descends to D sharp, back to E, with a skip to G sharp, then an ascent to C sharp and still another descent to E. Mm. 31 and 32 form the p.a.c. in the key of E major.

Courante (cont.)
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SUITE VI

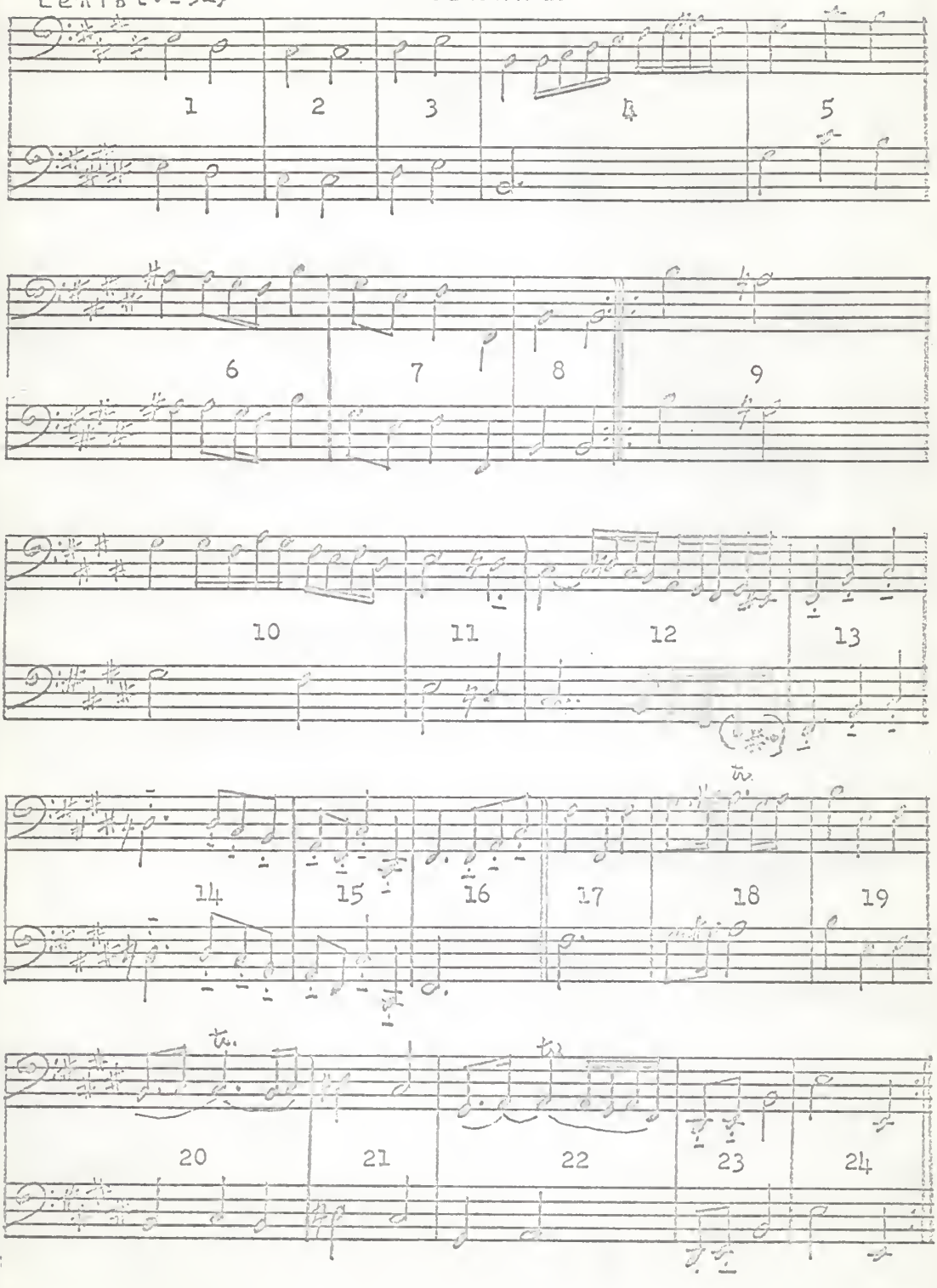
EXPLANATION OF SARABANDE

Part I includes mm. 1-8, beginning in E major and ending in B major. The first phase encompasses the eight measures included in Part I. The first stage, mm. 1-2, covers a descent from E to C sharp. In the second stage, which forms a strong i.a.c. in mm. 3-4, the bass moves from D sharp to E, then skips down a fourth to B. A third stage, mm. 5-6, features a bass which skips from G sharp to C sharp, then descends scalewise to F sharp, skipping up a fourth to B. A fourth stage, mm. 7-8, is a p.a.c. in the key of B major.

Part II includes mm. 9-24, beginning in the key of B major and ending in the key of E major. The first phase, mm. 9-16, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of f sharp minor. The phase divides itself into three stages. The first, mm. 9-12, is a descending scale line from B to F sharp. In the second stage, m. 13 to the first beat of m. 15, the bass leaps from F sharp up a fourth to B, then proceeds to C sharp and on to D natural, followed by a descending scale line to A, skipping down to F sharp. In the third stage, from the last half of the first beat of m. 15 and m. 16, a p.a.c. is formed in the key of f sharp minor. A second phase, mm. 17-24, ends in a p.a.c. in E major. In the first stage, mm. 17-20, the bass ascends from F sharp to B, then skips to E and moves on to F sharp, skips down to B, and moves to C sharp, then back to B. In mm. 21-22, a second stage, the bass

Lento (♩= 52)

Sarabande



EXPLANATION OF SARABANDE (CONT.)

moves from D natural to C sharp, skips to G sharp and moves back to A, skipping again down to D sharp. Mm. 23-24 form a p.a.c. in E.

SUITE VI

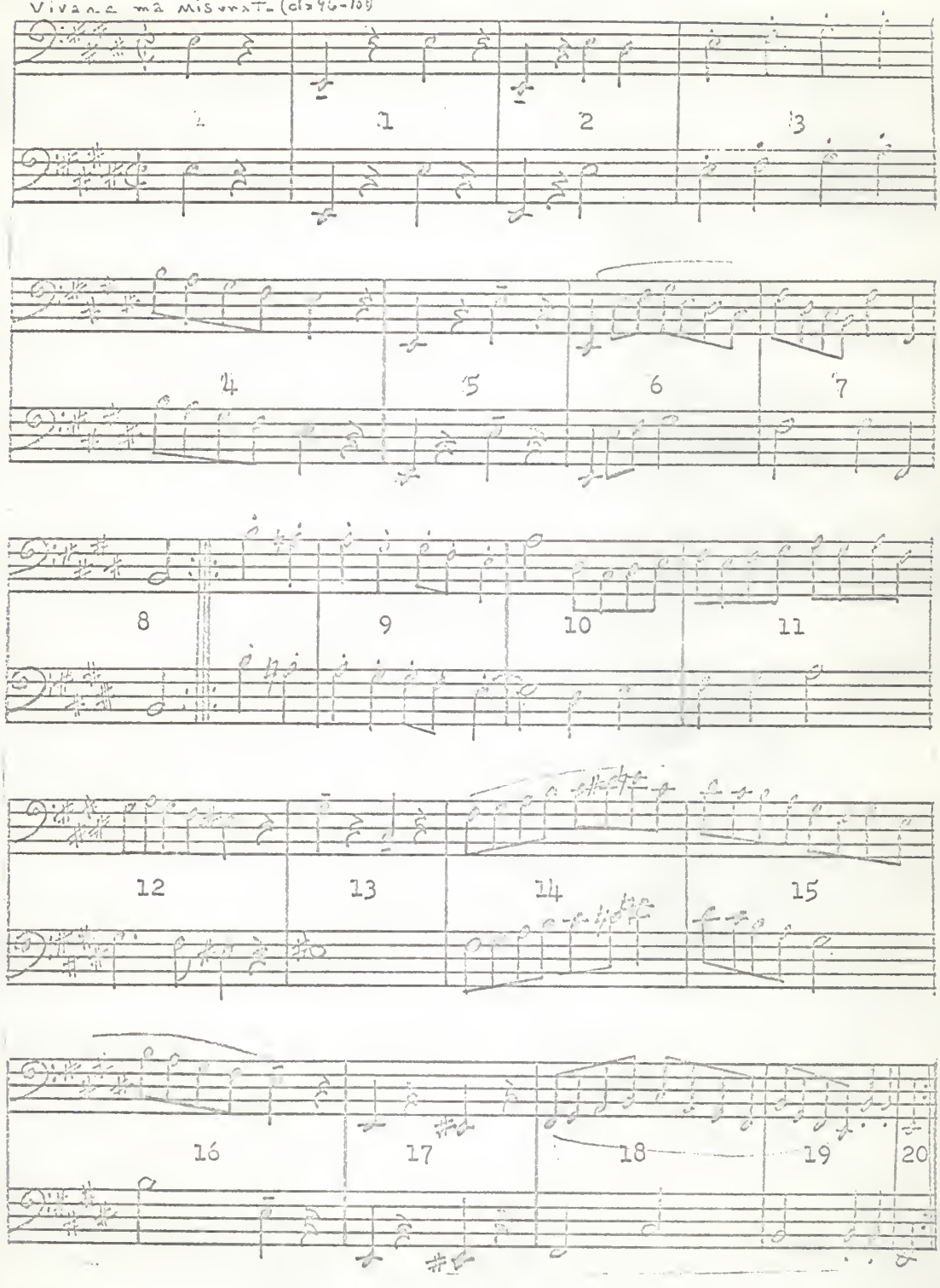
EXPLANATION OF GAVOTTE

Part I includes the anacrusis of m. 1 to m. 8, beginning in the key of E major and ending in B major. The eight measures of Part I encompass the first phase. This phase divides itself into four stages, the first being harmonically static, makes four references to E. The second stage, from the second beat of m. 2 to the second beat of m. 4, outlines the E major scale ascending from E to B and back down to E. A third stage, m. 5 and the first beat of m. 6, is harmonically static, making four references to E. A fourth stage, from the last half of the first beat of m. 6 to m. 8, is an ascending scale line from E to G sharp, then back to F sharp, the dominant of B major. The second beat of m. 7 and m. 8 form a p.a.c. in the key of B major.

Part II includes the anacrusis of m. 9 to m. 20, beginning in B major and ending in E major. Part II comprises one phase. The first stage includes the anacrusis of m. 9 to the first beat of m. 10 and is a descending scale progression from B to E. The second stage from the second beat of m. 10 to the second beat of m. 12 is a scalewise progression ascending from D sharp to A, then back to E sharp. A third stage, from the first beat of m. 13 to the first beat of m. 16, begins on E sharp, then moves to F sharp, then scalewise to E natural and down to G sharp, with a leap up to B. In a fourth stage, the second beat of

GAVOTTE

Vivace ma misurato (d=96-108)



EXPLANATION OF GAVOTTE (CONT.)

m. 16 to m. 20, the bass is static for two beats, making two references to E, then moves to E sharp and F sharp. Mm. 18-20 form a p.a.c. in E major.

SUITE VI

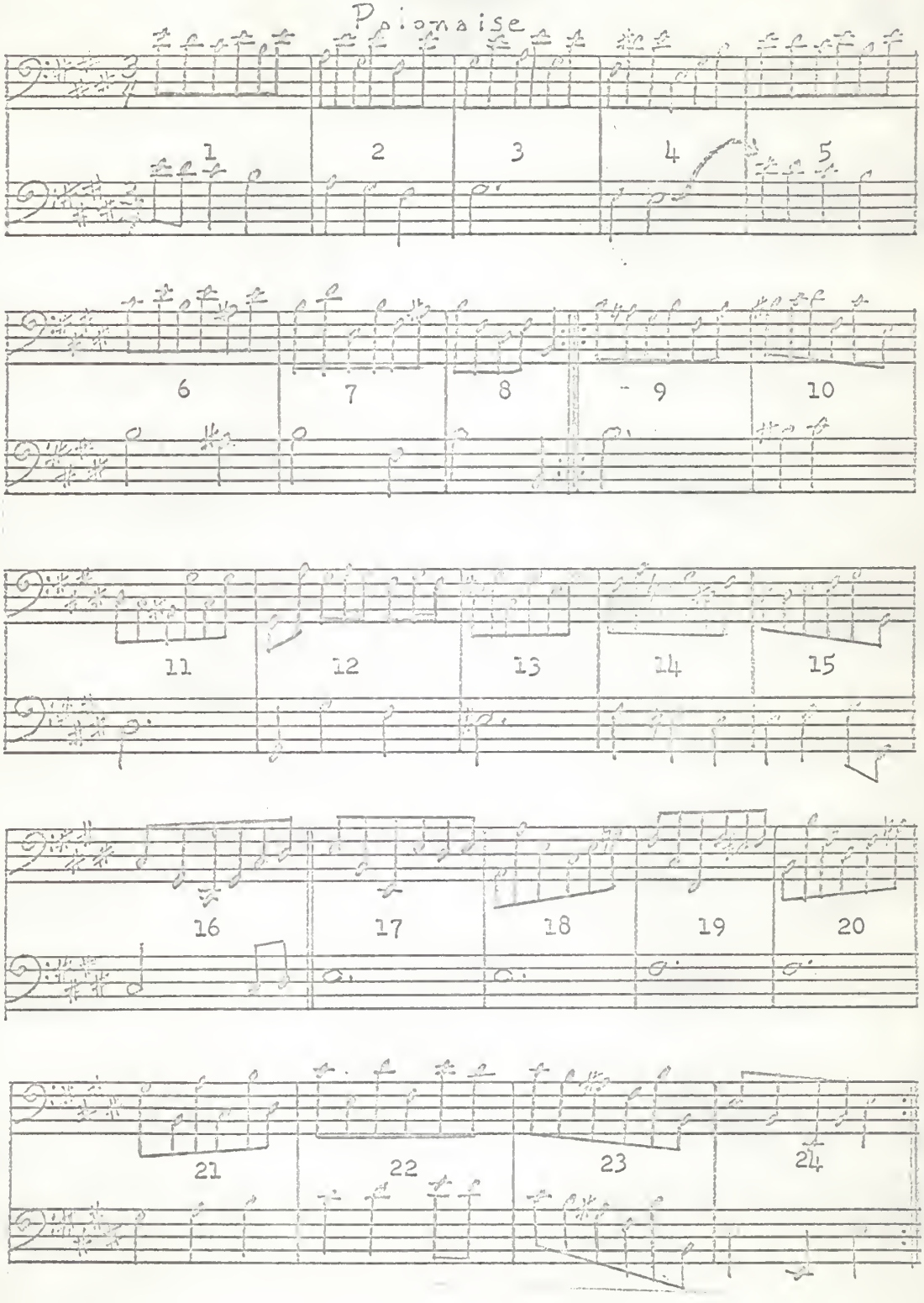
EXPLANATION OF POLONAISE

Part I includes mm. 1-8, beginning in E major and ending in B major. The first phase is a four measure phase, mm. 1-4, ending in a p.a.c. In the first stage, mm. 1-2, the bass assumes a descending scalewise direction from E to F sharp. The second stage, mm. 3-4, is a p.a.c. in the key of E major.

The second phase, mm. 5-8, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of B major. In the first stage, mm. 5-6, the bass continues the descending scale from E to A sharp. The second stage, mm. 7-8, is a p.a.c. in the key of B major.

Part II includes mm. 9-24, beginning in B major and ending in E major. The first phase, mm. 9-16, ends in a p.a.c. in the key of c sharp minor. The bass, mm. 9-12, moves scalewise from B to D sharp, skipping to the dominant and down to F sharp. In a second stage, m. 13 to the first beat of m. 15, the bass moves from E sharp to F sharp, then back to E. The third stage, m. 15 and the first two beats of m. 16, is a cadence in the key of c sharp minor.

The second phase, mm. 17-24, ends in a p.a.c. in E major. The first stage, mm. 17-24, encompasses the entire phase, and the E major scale is outlined, beginning on E in m. 17 and proceeding to E, the octave above, in m. 22. Here the bass line descends to A sharp. The last half of the second beat of m. 23 and m. 24 form a p.a.c. in the key of E major.


Polonaise
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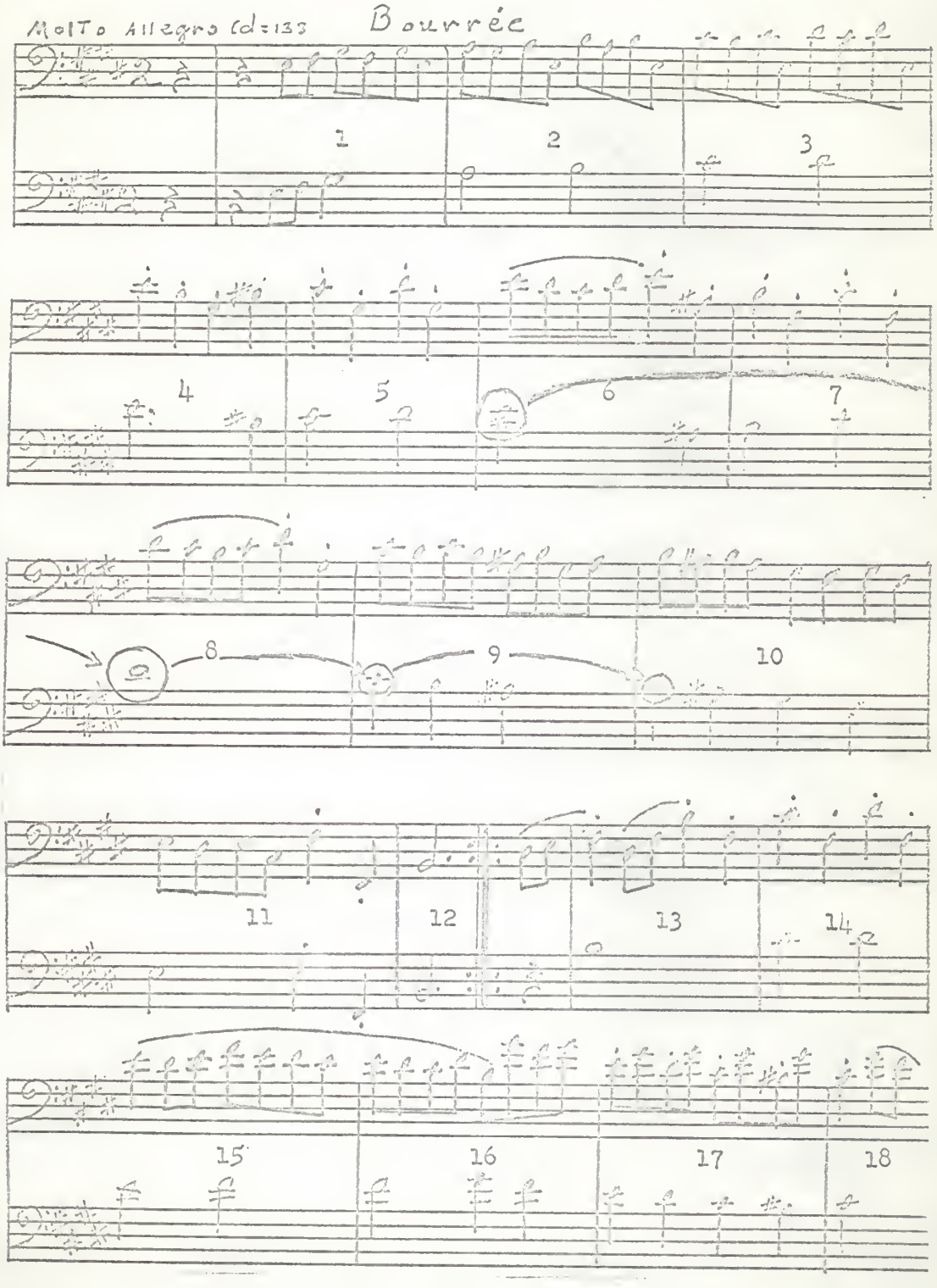
SUITE VI

EXPLANATION OF BOUREE

Part I includes mm. 1-12, beginning in E major and ending in B major. The first phase is a four measure phase, m. 1 to the second beat of m. 4, outlining the ascending E major scale. The scale line is formed of harmonic and passing tones which also support subsidiary figures which develop false sequences.

The second phase, from the last half of the second beat of m. 4 to m. 12, begins in the key of c sharp minor and ends on a p.a.c. in B major. The first stage, from the second beat of m. 4 to the first beat of m. 6, is an ascending scale line from B sharp to E. The second stage, from the second beat of m. 6 to m. 11, forms a great descending B major scale from E' to small E; D sharp is in m. 8; C sharp in m. 9; B, A sharp, G sharp, F sharp in m. 10, and E in m. 11. These scale tones support subsidiary scale patterns outlining sequences. The third stage, mm. 11-12, is a cadence in the key of B major.

Part II includes the anacrusis of m. 13 to m. 42, beginning in the key of B major and ending in the key of E major. The first phase is a twelve measure phase, from the anacrusis of m. 13 to m. 24, beginning in the key of B major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of f sharp minor. The first stage includes the anacrusis of m. 13 to the second beat of m. 16. The movement of the bass covers an ascent from B to G sharp. The line itself is formed of harmonic and passing tones with the former

Molto Allegro (d=133
Bourrée
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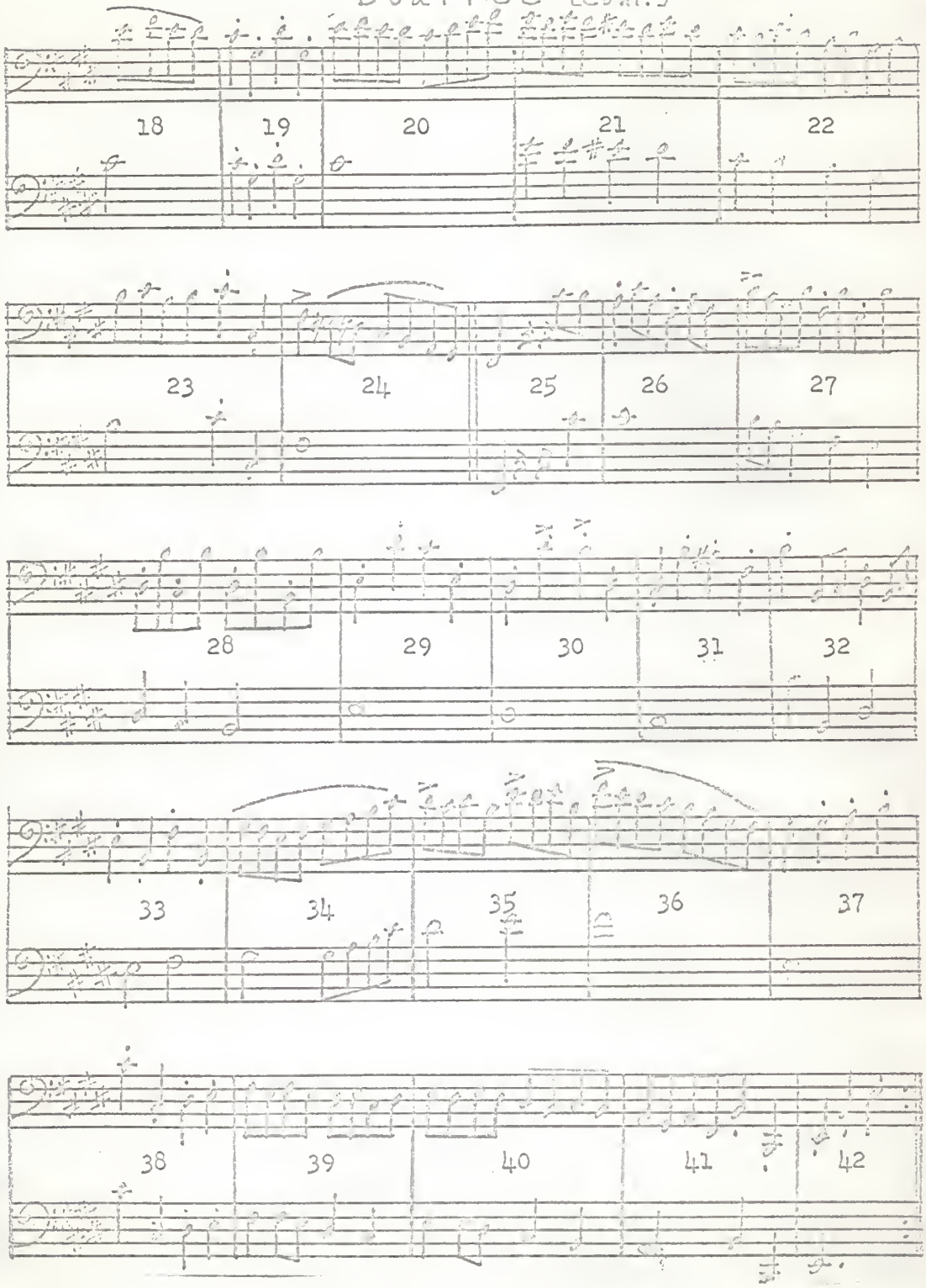
16
17
18

occurring on the beat. The line also supports subsidiary figures which include small scale fragments and several leaps. These reflect harmonic activity, giving rhythmic definition and developing sequences. The second stage includes the second beat of m. 16 to m. 20 and features a descending scale line from F sharp to B sharp, followed by an i.a.c. in the key of c sharp minor. This bass line also supports subsidiary figures which include false sequences and short scale fragments. The third stage, mm. 21-22, is a descending scale passage of an octave from G sharp to G sharp, the scale line itself being formed of harmonic and passing tones which form sequences. The fourth stage, mm. 23-24, is a p.a.c. in the key of f sharp minor.

The second phase is an eighteen measure phase beginning in the key of f sharp minor and ending in E major. The first stage, mm. 25-33, is one of movement where the bass leaps from F sharp up to C sharp, then progressing scalewise down to B, a ninth below. Mm. 29-32 form a descending scale line from E to B, ending in an i.a.c. in the key of E major. The bass line supports three sequences. The second stage, mm. 33-37, is an ascending scale line from E to F sharp, the ninth above, ending in an i.a.c. In this line are harmonic and passing tones which form fake sequences and in mm. 36-37 the E major scale. The third stage, mm. 38-40, is first an ascending scale from C sharp to E in m. 38, then a descending scale line from F sharp to C sharp in m. 39. Another scale line is formed from E down to A

Bourrée (cont.)



EXPLANATION OF BOURREE (CONT.)

in m. 40. The fourth stage, mm. 41-42, is a p.a.c. in the key of E major.

SUITE VI

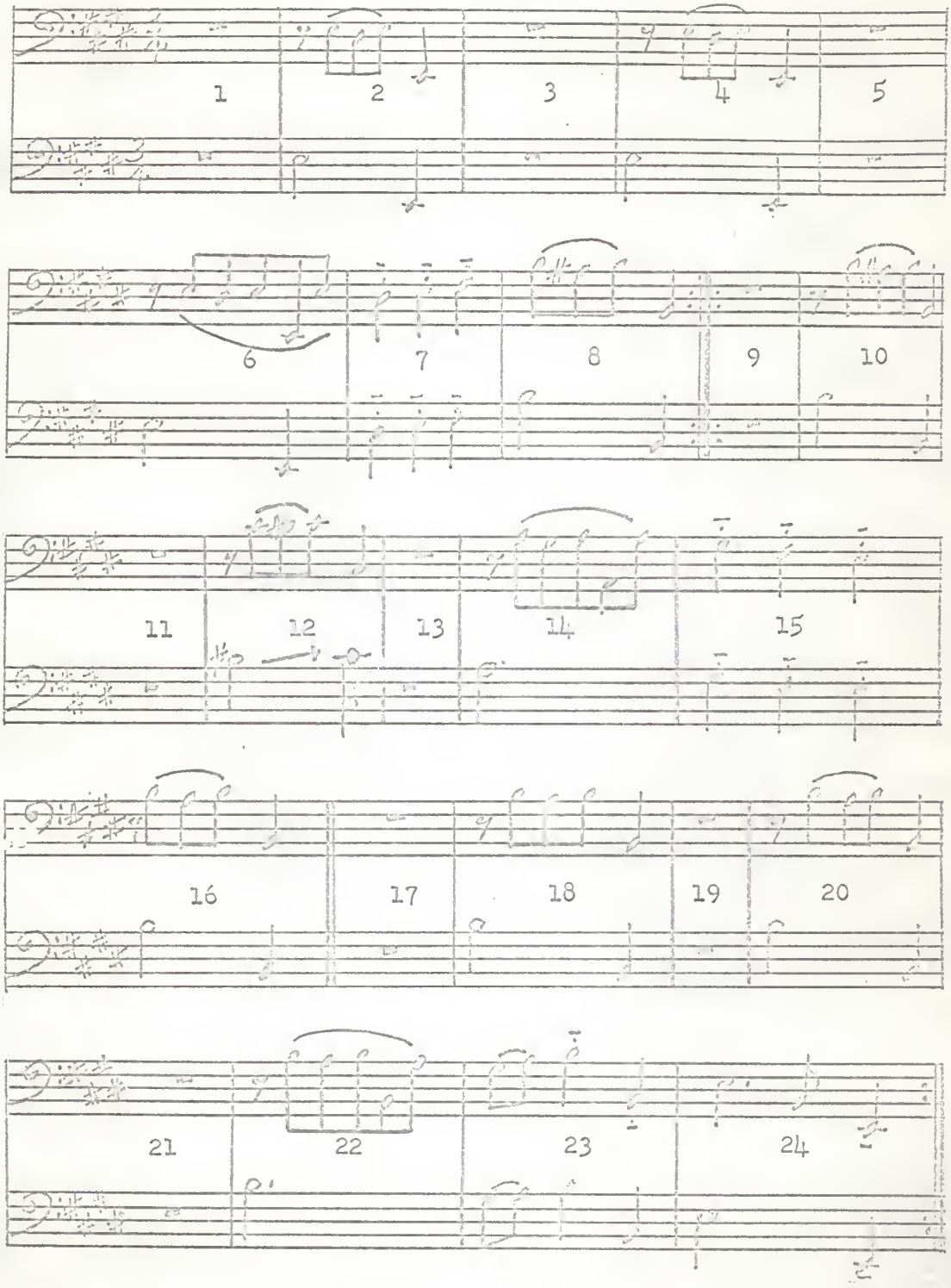
EXPLANATION OF MENUET

Part I includes mm. 1-8, beginning in the key of E major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of B major. The first phase encompasses the eight measures included in Part I. The first stage, mm. 1-6, is harmonically static, making ten references to E. The second stage, mm. 7-8, forms a basic scale line ascending from D sharp to F sharp, with m. 8 establishing the cadence in the key of B major.

Part II, mm. 9-24, begins in the key of B major and ends in a p.a.c. in the key of E major. The first phase, an eight measure phase, mm. 9-16, ends in a deceptive cadence in the key of E major. In the first stage, mm. 9-14, the bass assumes an ascending scalewise direction from B to B sharp and on to C sharp, then leaps up to A. In the second stage, mm. 14-16, there is a descending scalewise progression from A to E. M. 16 establishes a deceptive cadence in the key of E major.

The second phase, mm. 17-24, is an eight measure phase ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E major. The first stage, mm. 17-22, is harmonically static, making nine references to B. The second stage, mm. 23-24, forms an ascending scalewise progression from G sharp to B, with m. 24 establishing the p.a.c. in the key of E major.

Vivace (d.=60) Menuet



SUITE VI

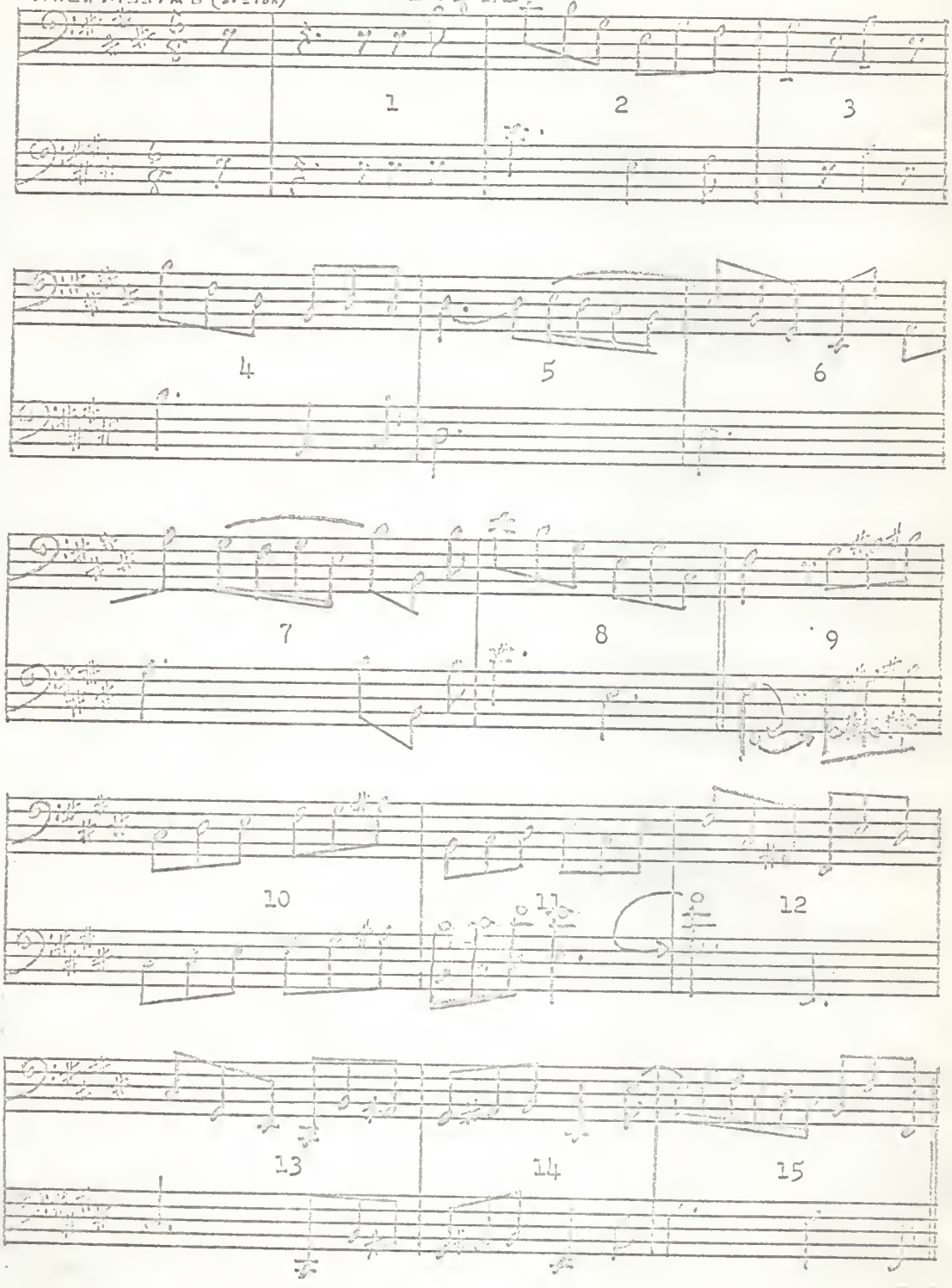
EXPLANATION OF GIQUE

Part I includes mm. 1-24, beginning in the key of E major and ending in the key of B major. The first part is divided into three phases. The first phase is an eight measure phase, mm. 1-8, ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E major. The first stage, from the anacrusis of m. 1 to the first beat of m. 4, outlines the lower tetrachord ascending in the key of E major. This bass line supports harmonic and passing tones. The second stage, from the second beat of m. 4 to the first beat of m. 6, outlines the upper tetrachord ascending in the key of E major, and so forms a continuous scale line from mm. 2-7. This also supports harmonic and passing tones and scale fragments. The third stage, mm. 7-8, is a p.a.c. in the key of E major.

The second phase is an eight measure phase, mm. 9-16, ending in a p.a.c. in the key of B major. The first stage, mm. 9-12, is a scalewise upward progression from C sharp to F sharp, adjusted by octaves. In the second stage, m. 12 to the first beat of m. 14, the bass begins on F sharp in m. 12 then leaps up to C sharp in m. 13 and then is a descending scalewise progression from C sharp to G sharp. A third stage from the second beat of m. 14 and m. 15 forms the p.a.c. in the key of B major.

Allegrissimo (♩.=108)

Giga

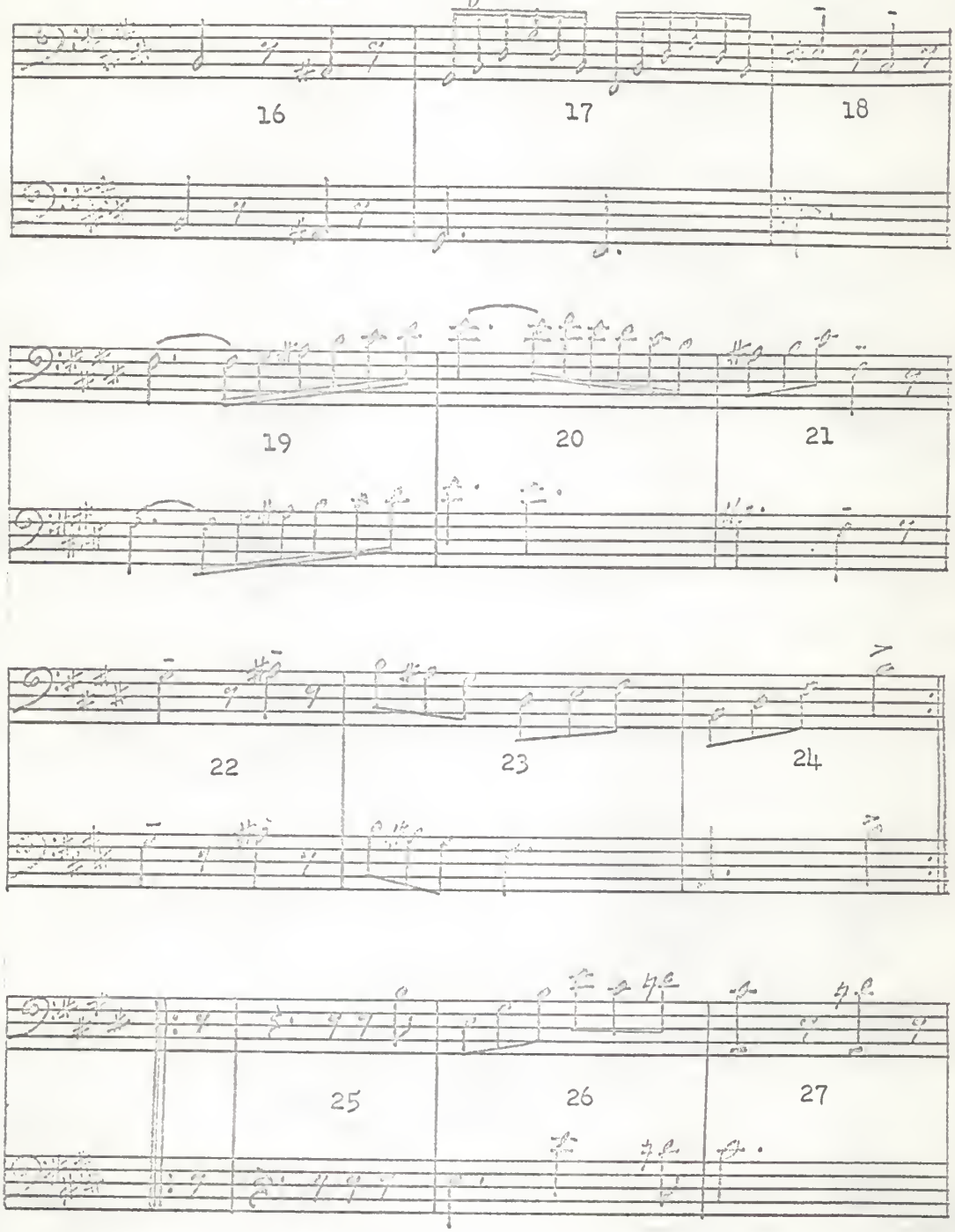


EXPLANATION OF GIQUE (CONT.)

The third phase, mm. 16-24, is in the key of B major. In the first stage, mm. 16-17, the bass outlines the upper descending tetrachord in the key of B major, outlining harmonic tones in m. 17 with the bass line falling on the beat. The second stage, mm. 19-20, outlines the ascending F sharp major scale. The third stage, mm. 21-22, begins on A sharp, with a skip down to F sharp then a scalewise upward progression to A sharp. The fourth stage, mm. 23-24, forms the p.a.c. in the key of B major.

Part II includes mm. 25-48, beginning in the key of E major and ending in a p.a.c. in the key of E major. The first phase is a ten measure phase, mm. 25-34, ending in a p.a.c. in the key of f sharp minor. The first stage, from m. 25 to the first part of the second beat of m. 26, is harmonically static with two references to E. The bass supports harmonic and passing tones.

Gigue (cont.)

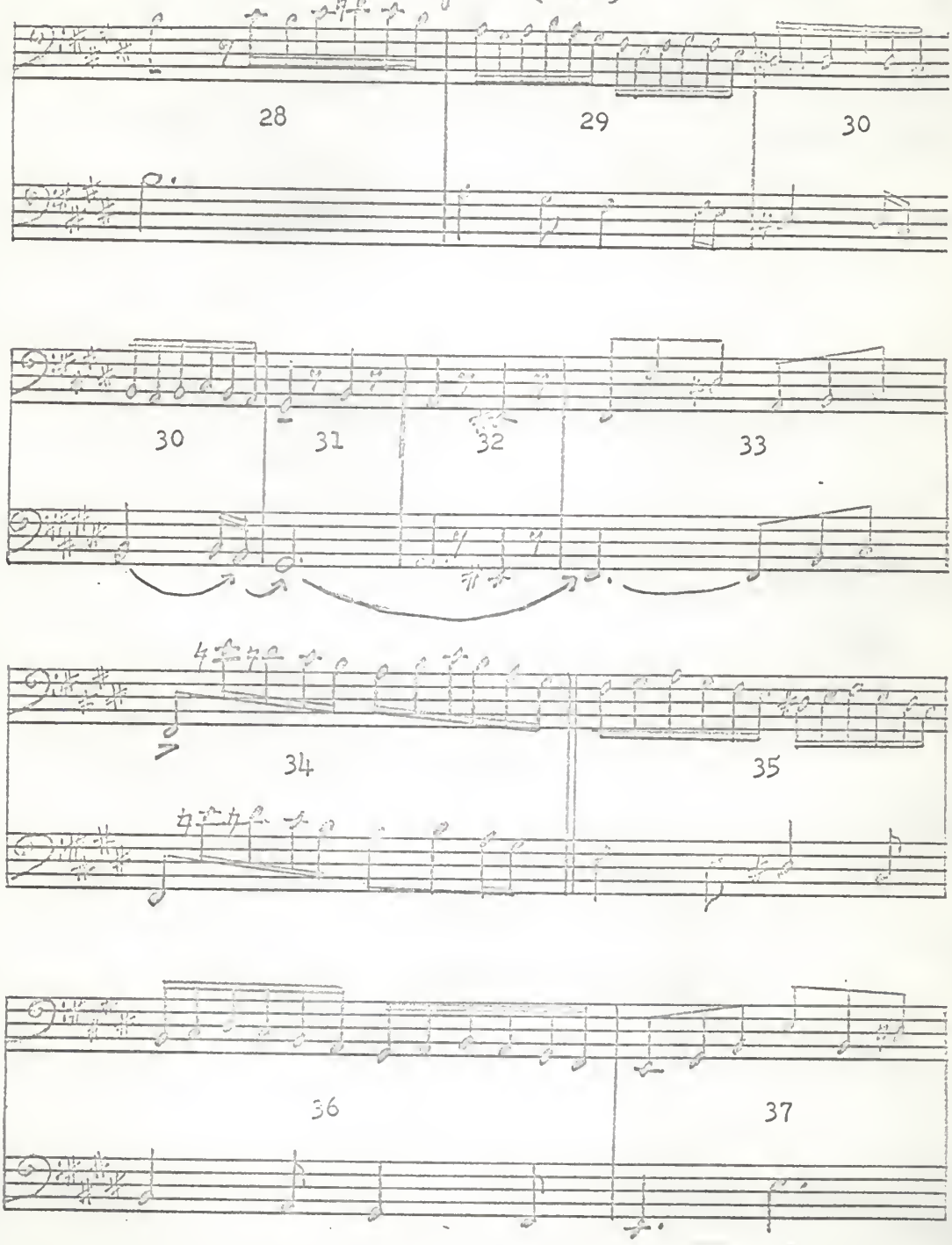


EXPLANATION OF GIQUE (CONT.)

The second stage, from the last part of the second beat of m. 26 to m. 30, is a descending scale progression from D natural to B, a tenth below. This bass line is supported by harmonic and passing tones. The line also supports subsidiary figures which include short scale fragments and develop five sequences. The third stage, m. 31 to the first beat of m. 33, progresses from G sharp to A with a leap downward to E sharp, then up to F sharp, thus establishing the key of f sharp minor. The fourth stage is a p.a.c. in the key of f sharp minor. Yet, in its larger aspect, the area from m. 26 to m. 33 presents a continuous scale line from E' to great F sharp.

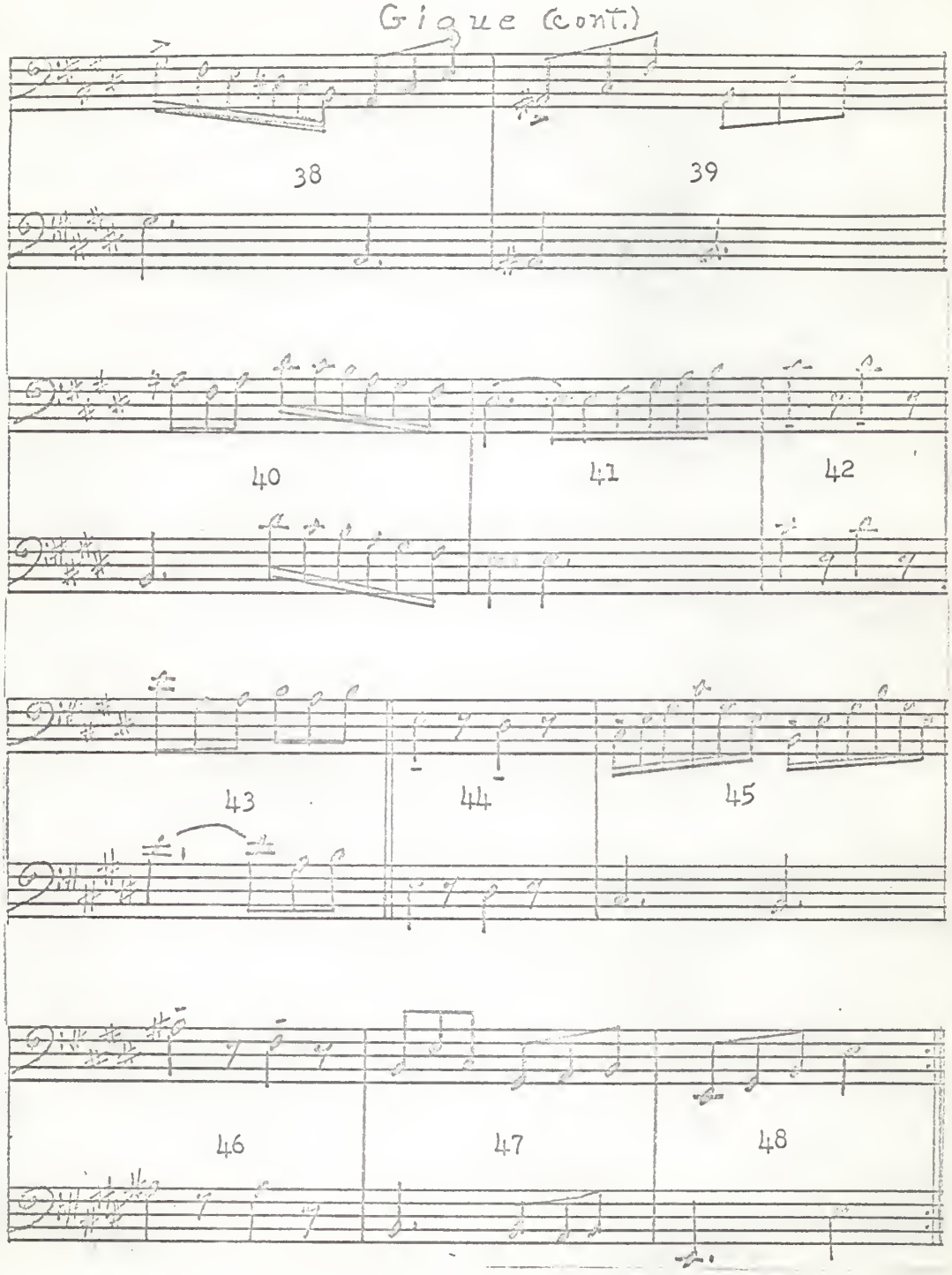
The second phase is a ten measure phase, beginning on the second beat of m. 34 to the first beat of m. 44, with a p.a.c. in the key of E major. The first stage, from the second beat of m. 34 to m. 37, is a descending scale line from A to E, a twelfth below. The bass line supports harmonic and passing tones and develops five sequences.

Gigue (cont.)



The second stage, from m. 38 to m. 41, is a scale line from G sharp, descending to A, then ascending to B, now skipping up to D sharp, an eleventh above. Again there is a descent to E. This bass line supports harmonic and passing tones and a scale line. The third stage, m. 42 to the first beat of m. 43, is an ascending scale line from C sharp to E. The fourth stage, from the second beat of m. 43 to the first beat of m. 44, is a p.a.c. in the key of E major.

The third phase, mm. 44-48, is a four measure phase. The first stage, mm. 44-46, is a descending scale line from E to A sharp. The second stage, mm. 47-48, is a p.a.c. in E major.


Gigue (cont.)
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

CONCLUSIONS

Bass lines in the French Suites are preponderantly in scalewise patterns in one kind or another. These patterns appear in a surprising number of ways. Some are made principally of harmonic tones; some have many non-harmonic tones; scales within scales are found. Some are quite long, and others fairly short.

Bass lines tend to progress toward their cadences in scale lines. The plate on page 24 of Part I of Menuet I, Suite II, illustrates a scale line progressing directly to the cadence. The bass outlines the c minor scale from C to E flat, a tenth above. The plate on page 62 of Part I of Gique, Suite VI, illustrates a scale line progressing directly to the cadence. The bass outlines the ascending E major scale from E to E, altered only by the octave.

Bass lines tend to progress toward their cadences in scale lines followed by shorter stages which are contained in the pattern of a sequence. The plate on page 55 of Part I of the Bourree, Suite VI, illustrates a bass which outlines the E major scale, an octave from E to E, which moves into short stages contained in the pattern of a sequence. The bass skips in a pattern of thirds by which m. 9 is a sequence of m. 10. Mm. 11-12 form the cadence.

Bass lines tend to move in interval patterns which form sequences and then progress in scale lines to the cadence. The plate on page 6, Part I of the Allemande, Suite II, illustrates this type of movement where the first stage, m. 1 to the second

beat of m. 2, is an interval pattern of a fourth down and a second up, which forms a sequence in thirds. The second stage, from the fourth beat of m. 2 to the first beat of m. 6, is a descending scale line from C to E. The third stage is an i.a.c. in the key of E flat major.

Bass lines tend to progress in leaps of a third, fourth, fifth or sixth and are without scale line connection and progress by the intervallic patterns to the scale line, cadence or sequence of intervals. The plate on page 45 of Suite VI, Part II of the Courante, first phase, second stage, mm. 22-24, illustrates a bass line which does not form a connecting scale line but rather the essential notes: F sharp, D sharp, B sharp, C sharp, A, G sharp leap in intervals of thirds and fifths, which then move in a scale line. The plate, page 12, Suite II, Part II of the Courante, first phase, second stage, m. 28, illustrates a bass which skips from C up to G, the interval of a fifth, then moves in a sequence of thirds. The plate on page 47 of Suite VI, Part II of the Sarabande, mm. 12-13, illustrates a bass which skips down the interval of a fifth from C sharp to F sharp, then up a fourth to B with short ascending and descending scalewise progressions, then into the cadence.

Bass lines tend to be harmonically static in some instances for a relatively short segment when one or two measures, for instance, begin and end on the same essential note, altered only by the octave. An example may be found on the plate on page 12

of Suite II, Part II of the Courante, mm. 25, 26 and 27 where before developing a scale line, the bass reiterates G. Another instance of a static stage may be found on the plate on page 36 from Suite VI, Part I of the Allemande, m. 1 and the first beat of m. 2, where the bass makes four references to E. Likewise in Part II, page 40, m. 13 and the first beat of m. 14, four references are made to B.

Bass lines tend to move scalewise with scale progressions within a scale line. The scale fragment is often sequential as illustrated in the plate on page 30, mm. 7-15 where the large scale line from C to F is interrupted by the smaller fragments, C, B flat, A flat and back to B flat and the B flat, A flat, G and back to A flat. The plate, page 55, mm. 6-11 illustrates a scalewise progress with scale fragments within the larger scale line from E to E, an octave below.

In the movement of a scale line there might be deviations which, however, actually do not break up the big feeling of scale movement. Bach uses the leap of the seventh rather than going on to the second and this is done without altering the scale line. The plate page 20, mm. 2-3 and 7-8 of the Air, Suite II, illustrates a leap of the seventh which actually does not alter the scale line. The plate on page 30, mm. 25-26 of the Gique, Suite II, also shows a leap of the seventh and the scale line does not seem to be altered.

Bass lines are in the form of an announcement which has not furthered the movement to the cadence. After four measures, for

example, we arrive back where we started. The plate page 36, mm. 1-4 of the Allemande, Suite VI, illustrates this type of maneuver. The bass line begins on E and comes back to E, altered only by the octave. This same type of maneuver is illustrated in the plate on page 30, mm. 1-7 of the Gique, Suite II, where the bass line ascends from C to middle C.

Almost all authentic cadences are formed with a leap upward of the interval of a fourth. In the plate, page 10, mm. 15-16, there is a leap from B flat to E flat and in mm. 23-24, a leap from D to G, thus forming the authentic cadences. The plate, page 20, m. 5 of the Air, Suite II, shows a leap upward of the fourth from B flat to E flat in the authentic cadence. Also in m. 9 there is a leap upward of a fourth from D to G to form the authentic cadence.

This study of the bass line in the French Suites of J. S. Bach and confined to the literature of a specific instrument, shows a consistency of proceeding in scalewise patterns quite surpassing the expectations of the author. The findings of this analysis augur that continued studies along this line, extended to the Bach organ and choral works might result in still more significant findings on Bach's technique and further extend our concept of the greatest genius of Baroque music.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE BASS LINE IN BACH'S FRENCH SUITES

by

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE BASS LINE IN BACH'S FRENCH SUITES

The purpose of this analysis was to study the techniques which Johann Sebastian Bach employed in the development of the bass line of the French Suites. The analysis is based on Klavierwerke, Breitkopf edition, Busoni-Ausgave, by J. S. Bach. It was noted that a great deal of uniformity exists in the six suites included in the work; hence, Suite II in minor and Suite VI in major were made the subjects for the analysis.

The first step in the analysis of the bass line was the locating of cadences as terminations of important segments. Cadences refer to authentic, especially perfect authentic cadences and half cadences whose effects are tonally punctuative. In the case of the authentic cadences, leaps from roots I to V were used as determining factors. Each bass span terminating in a cadence is referred to as a phase.

The second step was the determination of essential notes and the relationship of the unessential in movement from one essential to another. The essential notes refer to those used in a contrapuntal sense in relation to the upper voice. Different sections of the phases, marked by whether they are a series of essential bass tones, progressing by different pitches to their cadences, or remaining centered around some pitch axis, were then set aside as stages. Some stages were established as being static in character, that is, over a length of time as making no actual progress toward the cadence. Others were established as being progressive. A static stage occurs

when a relatively short segment, one or two measures, for instance, begins and ends on the same essential note or its octave by leap. A progressing stage involves the lineal aspects of the bass line. This progress is essentially in scale lines, less frequently in intervals of thirds, fourths, fifths in a sequence, or in leaps of the interval of a third, fourth, fifth or sixth without scale line connection, then progressing to the cadence.

Bass lines tend to progress toward their cadences in scale lines, frequently outlining an entire scale. Often these bass lines progress toward their cadences in scale lines followed by shorter stages which are contained in the pattern of a sequence, or they will move in interval patterns which form sequences and then progress in a scale line to the cadence. The bass line might progress in leaps of a third, fourth, fifth or sixth without scale line connection and progress by the intervallic patterns to the scale line, sequence of intervals or the cadence. Bass lines in some instances tend to be harmonically static for a relatively short segment when one or two measures, for instance, begin and end on the same essential note, altered only by the octave. Bass lines also tend to move scalewise with scale progressions within the larger scale line. The scale fragment is often sequencial. In the movement of a scale line there might be deviations which, however, do not break off the big feeling of scale movement. Bach, quite often, uses the leap of the seventh rather than going on to the second; however,

this does not alter the scale line. Bass lines are in the form of an announcement which has not furthered the movement to the cadence. After four measures perhaps we arrive back where we started. Almost all authentic cadences are formed with a leap upward of the interval of a fourth.

This study of the bass line in the French Suites of J. S. Bach and confined to the literature of a specific instrument shows a consistency of procedure in the work of this composer. The findings of this analysis are most interesting and significant and augur that continued studies along this line, extended to the Bach organ, string, and choral works might result in still more significant findings on Bach's technique and further extend our concept of the greatest genius of Baroque music.